



ASPECTS OF THE
IRISH QUESTION

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BY SYDNEY BROOKS

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SYDNEY BROOKS.

LONDON, 1912.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

A REVIEW OF THE PAST	I
--------------------------------	---

CHAPTER II

A GENERAL SURVEY	31
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTRY AND ITS PROBLEMS	49
--------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW ELEMENTS	76
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

THE FARMER AND THE FUTURE	105
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST CHANCE OF THE IRISH GENTRY .	136
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH AND THE "RELIGIOUS" ISSUE	156
--------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII

POLITICS AND THE HOME RULE BILL . .	205
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Aspects of the Irish Question

CHAPTER I

A REVIEW OF THE PAST

No attempt to interpret the Ireland of to-day can be helpful, can even be intelligible, without a constant throwing-back to the past. Other countries, Macedonia, for instance, and southern Italy and Sicily, have behind them a historical development as tortuous and mournful, as blood-soaked and convulsive; but with no country have fate and nature and human perversity dealt more harshly than with Ireland, and in none is it so indispensable that an ever-present consciousness of what has been should be the starting-point of any effort to elucidate what is. The unhappy legacy of the past culminates in the tragedy of the Irish present. You find the mark of its ravages wherever you turn, in all departments of Irish life, in the social and economic sphere as much as in the political and religious, in the mind and instinctive outlook of the people not less than in their material conditions. The resultant cannot be understood without some knowledge of the processes that have shaped it.

A Review of the Past

The unique conformation which Ireland presents, intricate and astounding in any case, is a riddle in the geology of politics that cannot even be propounded aright, much less solved, without a sifting of the deposits of centuries.

Shut off from the Continent by a larger, richer, more populous and incomparably more powerful kingdom, Ireland has always differentiated from the normal type of European evolution. She was never conquered, she was never even invaded, by the Romans; she escaped altogether the ordeal which was to prove the birth-throe of most Western civilizations. The Celts who had overrun the land and absorbed the aborigines long before the dawn of Irish history found in its isolation a refuge secure from the Roman legions. In Ireland the Celtic form of society, Celtic customs and characteristics, and the Celtic tongue developed with a freedom and in a seclusion unparalleled elsewhere. The Irish grew up the most self-contained and the least spoiled of Aryan peoples. The keystone of their organization was the tribal system, with its communal holding of land, its elective chiefs, its cement of a real or reputed kinship, its self-governing septs, and its overwhelming inclination towards a pastoral life. Politically the tribes had little effective unity. The rivers, marshes and woods would alone have sufficed to prevent the growth of anything resembling the Roman idea of a State. Tribal wars and raids were frequent; and though a sense of spiritual community

based on common customs, a common language, common traditions and culture, and a single code of law undoubtedly prevailed, the groups had neither the framework nor the desire of a more visible and material union. Yet this loosely organised system, without centralised coherence or efficiency, but strong and rigid in its parts, with no accepted and dominating seat of authority, and constitutionally fatal to political, though by no means to social, progress, lasted on in Ireland for centuries after it had disappeared from the rest of Europe. Even as an institution it was not finally uprooted until the reign of Elizabeth, and as an economic, social and intellectual influence it persists to this day.

Tribalism penetrated the Irish mind with the conviction that the Irish soil belonged of right to the Irish people, and this conviction, after embroiling Anglo-Irish relations and baffling British domination for seven and a half centuries, has now all but extinguished landlordism and is creating a peasant proprietary by the free use of English credit. Here and there you may still encounter in Ireland forms of land-holding—a ten-acre field, for instance, split up into scattered fragments among a dozen or more tenants—that are essentially tribal. Tribalism, again, fostered an intensive spirit of conservatism, and the Celtic Irish have an almost Malayan aversion to change. It subordinated home life to the life of the sept, and the Irish are still

a distinctively gregarious people. It encouraged pasture and discouraged labour, and Ireland to-day is predominantly a stock-raising country, and has yet to assimilate if not the gospel of work, at any rate the industrial virtues. It promoted internecine feuds, and the spirit of faction permeates native Irish life to this moment. It shielded, as nothing else could, the mind and temperament and customs of the people from external influences, and no one can visit Ireland to-day without being made conscious of a strain of almost unadulterated Asiaticism in some of the workings of the Irish mind, in certain traits of the people's character, in several of their instinctive ways of looking at things, and in many of their social usages. When Lord Dufferin described the Bengali as the Irishman of the East it was not on the Bengali alone that he threw a light.

The strength which tribalism derived from the very looseness of its organisation and from the impossibility of overthrowing it at a single stroke was shown by the manner of its conversion to Christianity. It adopted the new religion, but was not absorbed by it. The people became Christians, but the Church to a far greater degree became Celtic, and for some centuries remained somewhat isolated from the Western communion. While unable to graft her law on the tribes, she raised Ireland to a brief but high pre-eminence in learning and the arts. Irish missionaries spread over the Continent; the Irish monasteries attracted scholars from all over

Europe; and the subtle and intricate traceries and spirals of Celtic design developed under the tutelage of the Church into a new and brilliant school of metal-work and illumination. But influences that might in time have knit Ireland with the broad movement of European progress were checked and dissipated by foreign invasion. The Danes swept over the island, an ecclesiastical exodus followed, and the country fell back again into its self-contained aloofness. The Celts were never a predominantly commercial or seafaring people, and the Danes from the few seaports in the south and east to which they were finally penned quickly gathered into their own hands whatever foreign trade there was.

It is true the Church was reorganised on a Latin basis, and thus came once more into tentative touch with the temporal power of Rome. But it has always been the fate of Ireland to lie more or less in a backwater and to give to the world more than she receives from it. For three and a half centuries after the Anglo-Norman invasion, tribalism, somewhat modified by the influence of the new settlers, continued to inform the faculties and temperament of her people and to intensify their separateness. The Reformation came not to touch her with a new vitality, but to confuse and embitter her social and political development with a sectarian contentiousness. Drawn into the wars of religion, Ireland experienced a momentary contact with countries other than England. But it was of too one-sided

a character to stem the current of Anglicisation. The Catholic Powers used Ireland as a pawn and Irish soil as an occasional battle-ground; they enrolled Irish officers and troops in their Continental armies; men of Irish birth rose to power and honour in their councils. But they gave back nothing in return, and except for a glimpse now and then of a possibly Spanish type of countenance and of architecture in the West, one would not guess to-day that Ireland had ever come within the range of any European influence but England's. With hardly a break or deflection the English type of civilisation has steadily imposed itself from the sixteenth century till to-day. The American Revolution had its reflex action on Irish politics; the French Revolution evoked a short-lived outburst of republicanism in the north; some flicker of the spirit of '48 showed itself for a moment in Irish agitation; but otherwise Ireland has remained completely cut off from all except English influences. It is only within the last sixty years that the great emigrations to America, Canada, and Australia have linked her, sorrowfully enough, with a wider destiny and larger interests. From the Continent, except through the medium of the Roman Catholic Church, she is still severed not so much in sympathies and in intellect as in commerce, politics and fact, by the interposing might of Great Britain.

This geographical isolation acting on a people

naturally conservative, with little aptitude for commerce, inclined to the least progressive form of agriculture—tillage in Ireland, as Professor Goldwin Smith has rightly noted, was marked from its birth with a bar sinister—and bound long after other nations had outgrown it to a system that both reflected and fostered their intolerance of innovation, must in any case have nourished the introspective instincts of the Celts, have driven them in upon themselves, and have stamped upon Irish life an exclusive and peculiar intensity. The neighbourhood of England made it not less certain that that isolation could not permanently endure. That it should have been broken, however, in a form that complicated every element of national evolution and added a new contentiousness of class, race and privilege to the interplay of tribal strife was a catastrophe the effects of which are felt to this day. The Anglo-Norman invasion, soon after the middle of the twelfth century, introduced into Ireland a body of conquerors and settlers who, while sharing the religion of the natives, differed from them in speech, in temperament, in racial characteristics and in the fundamental cast of their civilisation. Feudalism from that moment confronted tribalism, an English interest the Irish people, the Teuton the Celt.

Thus early in the history of Anglo-Irish relations the three cleavages of land, race, and a favoured faction backed by a foreign Power and seeking to impose its rule over the native

population, began to show themselves. Thus early, too, appeared the lack of definiteness which has marked from that day to this England's Irish policy. No attempt was made to effect a thorough conquest of Ireland. The Anglo-Norman settlement was never probably effective over more than a third of the Irish soil, the Normans establishing themselves in the rural parts north and south of Dublin and the English in the seacoast towns. England's interest in her colony was weak and fitful. She would neither rule it nor rule through it. Between the settlers and the tribes ensued three centuries of such border warfare as the English in America were afterwards to wage with the Red Indians. The conquest of the Celts by the settlers, the expulsion of the settlers by the Celts, were alike impossible. Inherent disunion made the attacks of the tribes spasmodic; lack of sufficient force and the barrier of river, bog and forest kept the Pale restricted to defence. Without the cement of kingship, drawn upon for the purposes of the Scottish and French wars, weakened by absenteeism and a foreign education, and harassed incessantly by the tribes, it began to dwindle and disintegrate. Edward Bruce's invasion nearly drove it to the sea. The Norman landowners in the rural districts of the settlement became gradually Celticised, while the English traders in the towns maintained their nationality intact. Feudalism and tribalism formed a patchwork fringe to a country two-thirds of which remained

purely Celtic. The beginning of the sixteenth century found Ireland turned into a political dependency of England, but a dependency in which English authority covered hardly a fourth of the island. It found, too, tribalism modified but still predominant, feudalism vital but losing rather than gaining ground, and both systems already survivals of an order of things that in England and on the Continent had been left behind. But for the decisive interposition of a great historical event the Anglo-Norman settlement of Ireland would probably have been sapped or stormed.

That event was, of course, the Reformation. The English and Anglo-Norman colonists in town and country, and the native Celts, all professed the Catholic religion, but they maintained to some extent separate churches and a separate clergy, and neither quite regarded the other as within the fold of Christianity. Both races, however, were at one in rejecting the new faith. "To the Catholic lords of the Pale the Elizabethan religion was alien; to the native Celts it was not only alien, but utterly abhorred. It presented itself, not as the religion of Ireland, but as the religion of the conqueror." The warm and imaginative Celtic temperament, which has never yet found a resting-place between Rome and Geneva, revolted from the measured formalism of the Anglican creed. A people pre-eminentlly devoted to ceremonial rites and emblems, to sacerdotalism and to the monastic

life, had no single instinct of sympathy for a movement which chose these features of their faith for its special attack. Politically, intellectually, and socially it appealed as little to their minds and to their conceptions of life and society as its spiritual essence and formulas appealed to their emotions.

The ground in Ireland had never been prepared for such a revolution, nor was there the smallest impulse to welcome it when it came. The suppression of the Irish monasteries, the defacement and destruction of the hallowed shrines, statues and relics, were followed by the masses with boundless resentment. Himself a Celt, Henry VIII. had initiated in Ireland a policy of secular conciliation. He approached the tribal chieftains in a shrewd and friendly spirit, hoping to form among them a native nobility, to invest them with a grant direct from the Crown of their tribe-lands, to receive in return an acknowledgment of his supremacy in Church and State, and so to establish throughout the country centres of authority from which English laws, customs and civilisation might gradually radiate. But he fell into the fundamental error of ignoring the differences between feudal and tribal tenure. He treated the chiefs as the absolute owners of the land, in their share of which the tribal system allowed them no more than a life interest. The personal pledges and undertakings of a chief could bind neither the heads of the septs nor the free tribesmen who

electd his successor ; and the chiefs who made submission to the Crown and agreed to become the King's tenants were without the power, when once beyond the narrow range of his effective rulership, to force the compact on their tribal kinsmen. Yet if it were violated, the Crown, by English and feudal law, claimed and exercised the right to confiscate the whole of the tribe-lands.

Thus the policy of consolidating British power by negotiations instead of force split on the eternal rocks of religion and land. Yet it was essential for England's security that her authority—inseparable, under the conditions of the time, from her faith and civilisation—should be imposed upon Ireland. As the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism broadened out into a vast European struggle, Ireland, which hitherto had been merely England's disgrace, now became England's danger. A Catholic Ireland, acknowledging Papal, but not English, sovereignty, was a formidable weapon in the hands of the anti-Protestant coalition and an insufferable menace to the concentration of England's power. The conquest of Ireland, the conversion and Anglicisation of Ireland, had become political necessities. Only the effective supremacy of England over all parts of the country could forestall or at least diminish the peril that Ireland might furnish the spear-head of the shaft aimed by the Catholic Powers at England's heart. It fell to Elizabeth, who

would willingly have shrunk from it, to achieve the task. Her excommunication and deposition by papal bull forced it on her. Three great Irish rebellions, waged and suppressed with mutual and unsurpassable cruelties, filled her reign. When it closed Celtic Ireland had ceased to be; the country lay crushed, desolate and starving at England's feet. Vast forfeitures and confiscations followed, and English colonies began to be systematically planted. Protestantism was enthroned as the state religion, and conformity to it was prescribed rather than enforced. The central aim of the Elizabethan policy was political domination, and there were at first no penal laws and little persecution. Protestant administrators and officials, imported from England, superseded the English of the Pale, most of whom, while not becoming rebels, had remained Catholic. But it was in the spheres of law and land and government rather than in that of religion that the fruits of the Elizabethan conquest most plainly appeared. "Ireland, conquered, now became shire land, at least in contemplation of law. The law of England, in the eyes of its professors the consummation of human wisdom, ousted the Brehon law. The feudal system of land tenure supplanted the tribal system. Freehold and leasehold primogeniture and entail, took the place of tribal ownership and tenantry. Justice was henceforth to be administered in English courts, and judges were to go circuit as in England . . . The whole machinery of

government, as well as law and the judiciary, was at the same time assimilated, formally at least, to the English model."

Throughout the seventeenth century the process of Anglicisation went bloodily on. Huge grants of land were made under James I. to English and Scotch settlers in Ulster and elsewhere. By seizure and escheat, by indefensible acts of legal chicanery and bad faith, the Catholic landowners, whether Celtic or Anglo-Norman, were steadily dispossessed. Protestantism, veering towards Puritanism, increased the stringency of its enactments. All the animosities of race and religion were precipitated into a fight for the land. Twice the natives rose and massacred and achieved a brief ascendancy, only to see it twice torn from them. Rebellion was answered by wars of extermination, defeat by wholesale confiscations. Neither Rome nor France availed to arrest the final triumph of English power. Devastation and evictions, slaughterings, banishment, forfeitures and emigration, Cromwell and William III., numberless grants of land to individual adventurers and a systematic policy of colonisation by Scotch and English settlers, made an end of the Catholic proprietors. Under a common proscription and defeat the descendants of the old Celtic chieftains and tribesmen and the descendants of the old Anglo-Norman nobility sunk their feuds, and though still speaking different languages, came to acknowledge in their misfortunes, their Catholicism and their detestation

of Puritanism, a real bond of unity. Religion overrode race and nationality in the daily speech. Men spoke of Catholics when they meant the Irish, of Presbyterians when they referred to the Scotch settlers in the north, and of members of the State Church when they wished to designate the new English colonists. Five centuries of Anglo-Irish history had destroyed the native civilisation, had dispossessed the people of their holdings, had marshalled on either side of the agrarian struggle the bitterest antagonisms of racial and religious strife, and had vested in a small minority of alien speech, temperament and creed practically all political power, and all the privileges of a legal, social and territorial ascendancy.

For nearly a century this privileged oligarchy, created by conquest, established by confiscations, upheld by the power of England, maintained, though divided within itself, an unbroken supremacy. It was a domination of Protestants, but the Protestants were not united. Half of them were Presbyterians, excluded by law from public offices, forced to pay tithes to a Church that they abhorred only less than they abhorred Catholicism, and separated from their co-religionists by the economic rivalries of manufacturers with landowners. Virtually all authority was in the hands of the Episcopalians. They trod the Catholic population under heel, reducing it by the ingenious iniquity of the Penal Code to a status of outlawry. They ruled the Presbyterians with a rigid and masterful pertinacity; and

while dependent for their security and privileges, and indeed for their very existence, upon English arms, they had to defend their interests against a Parliament that would grant them neither union nor independence, and that jealously repressed every promise of Irish competition with the commerce and industries of the mother country. Against this converging onset of difficulties they stood their ground for the better part of the eighteenth century with a phenomenal tenacity. Under their rule Ireland had unwonted, if artificial, peace. The country was opened up by roads and canals; civilisation, the arts and humanities spread; Dublin became the second city of the Empire; and the colonists developed a new type of character that still charms by its happy union of "Celtic" vivacity, sensitiveness and grace with "Saxon" hardihood and practicality.

But the abnormality of their position could only be maintained by repression and persecution on the one side and an intricate balancing of hostilities on the other. The Catholics were crushed into subjection. They were shut out from all public appointments, from Parliament, from the franchise, from the jury-box, from the police force, from the legal and learned professions. Education either at home or abroad or in a university was forbidden them. They could not keep arms or own a horse worth more than five pounds. A determined effort was made to stamp out their religion. Archbishops and bishops, monks and friars were banished. Marriage between a Protestant

and a Catholic was prohibited. Catholics were not allowed to buy land or hold mortgages on it or lease it except for a short time and with limited profits or to bequeath it by will. The equal testamentary division of such estates as still remained to Catholics was made compulsory. These and similar provisions of the Penal Code attained some at least of their ends. They finally crushed the Catholic gentry of the upper and middle classes. Great numbers of them emigrated and rose to honour in the service of foreign Powers. Nearly all ceased to own land. But persecution failed as usual to make converts. The people clung with unconquerable firmness to their ancient faith, and the unique authority which the priesthood wielded in the Ireland of to-day dates unquestionably from the enforcement of the Penal laws.

The masses throughout the eighteenth century remained meanwhile in a deplorable condition, cowed but unreconciled. A liberal commercial policy might have helped them, but English statesmanship was bound to the theory that a colony was an estate whose usefulness began and ended with serving the industrial and agricultural interests of the mother country. The colonial system that induced the American Revolution was applied to Ireland with a thoroughness from which distance saved the New England settlements. Whatever industry Ireland turned to, from wool to cotton, from glass to brewing, from gloves to linen, was deliberately ruined or

crippled by English legislation. The masses were flung back upon the land and the land impaled them. A fearful competition grew up among a starving and congested peasantry for the privilege of leasing from their Protestant masters, at rents that could only be paid by a progressive lowering of every social standard, a few acres of the soil that once was their own by tribal right. From their landlords they were separated by speech and creed and the memories of ferocious wars. No tie of immemorial usage sanctified or humanised the new relations of proprietor and tenant. Evictions, which were unknown under the tribal and feudal systems, became the common incidents of a tenure based on a one-sided contract. Many of the landlords were absentees, and their place was taken by extortionate, rack-renting middlemen. The great change from tillage to pasture that marked the early years of the century brought in the grazing speculator with his writs of ejectment. The potato became the chief, almost the sole, dietary of the peasant serfs, and the frequent failures of the crop, under their primeval methods of cultivation, entailed famine and pestilence. The tithe proctor levied his toll on their wretched earnings in support of a Church which they detested as the apostate emblem of ascendancy. Of education they had none except what the priest brought them at peril of his life.

Deprived of their secular leaders by the decimation of the Catholic gentry they turned to the

ministers of their religion with more than the fervour of devotion they had formerly offered their tribal chiefs. The consolations of religion derived a new potency from their miseries on earth. Under a systematised stigma of subjection their instinct of indolence, inherited from tribal days, came to be penetrated with the lethargy of fatalism. Their character took on the virtues and failings that are the common product of oppression. The spirit of neighbourly helpfulness, always a Celtic trait, developed progressively with their afflictions. But they acquired, too, a less pleasing but not less natural command of all the artifices which are the invariable defence of a weak and quick-witted race in its struggle against government by force. Disimulation and deceit, a profound capacity for concealing their real opinions, an extreme facility in feigning agreement, became rooted in their minds as virtues. Self-reliance, a quality which the form of Celtic society, with its radical suppression of the individual, had never favoured, was completely crushed by an accumulation of adversities. The habit of secret conspiracy and organisation, of forming retaliatory leagues and brotherhoods of vengeance—a habit which has also its clear associations with the tribal past—grew as the possibility of legal remedies became more remote. Outlaws in fact, they became outlaws in spirit and in deed. Chained to ignorance, they nourished their warm and fanciful minds on the legends and superstitions

of their fathers. Though sunk in an appalling poverty, which was aggravated by rapid reproduction, they preserved something of their happy racial carelessness and their old delight in games, the dance and minstrelsy ; and strangely passive as they remained throughout the greater part of the century, two fierce agrarian wars and the multiplication of secret societies were omens of what was to come.

But the Catholic peasantry were not alone in their grievances. The Presbyterians in the north chafed bitterly under the ascendancy of the Established Church, the exactions of the tithe-collector, and the religious tests that excluded them from office and from the army, disputed the validity of their marriages, and interfered with their worship and education. As manufacturers they were all but ruined by the commercial restrictions and the navigation laws. As farmers they not only had to meet the competition of the Celtic peasants, who habitually starved themselves to pay higher rents, but equally with their rivals they suffered from evictions, the extension of pasture, and the pressure of an unscrupulous landlordism. Discontent broke out in agrarian uprisings and outrages, and finally took the form of steady emigration to the American colonies, where the Presbyterian refugees from Ulster were to prove the backbone of the Revolution. And both Presbyterians and Episcopalians protested against the price which England forced them to pay

for the protection and privileges they enjoyed. They had few or none of the rights of Englishmen. Their Parliament, overrun by placemen from England, was absolutely under the control of the English Privy Council. It met only once in two years, and in George II.'s reign it lasted for thirty-three years without renewal. "There was no Habeas Corpus. There were large sinecures, instruments of corruption in the hands of the Government. The pension list, swollen beyond bounds, was a privy fund for king's mistresses and for jobs too dirty for the English list." All the high offices of state, judicial, administrative and ecclesiastical, were filled by Englishmen. Ireland, in short, was treated as the American colonies were treated, but with far greater strictness, propinquity making the task of supervision easier and more thorough; and it was the American colonies that wrought her partial deliverance. A patriot party rose in the Irish Parliament, proclaiming Irish wrongs. The American Revolution denuded the country of troops. Forty thousand volunteers were enrolled ostensibly for the protection of Ireland against a French invasion. But the Presbyterians, who formed the majority of the rank and file of the force, joined with the Episcopalians in using it as an instrument for the redress of Irish grievances. Harassed and all but prostrated, England had no option but to yield. The tests were abolished; the commercial restrictions were swept away; the legislative and judicial in-

dependence of Ireland was completely and formally acknowledged.

There ensued for a little while one of the brightest periods in Irish history. The Parliament, though wholly Protestant, representing not more than a fourth of the population, and largely controlled by the British Government through its ownership of pensions, places and nomination boroughs, accomplished much for Ireland. It repealed the worst enactments of the Penal Code, which had, however, long before this fallen very largely into desuetude ; it passed a Habeas Corpus Act ; it fostered tillage, remodelled the Pension List, and gave a great impetus to industries and material development. But it did nothing for the peasantry, and while it extended the franchise to Catholic holders of forty shilling freeholds, it failed to secure their admission to Parliament. Beneath the surface Ireland was as disunited, and the Irish Parliament as much a stronghold of Protestant ascendancy, as ever. The Catholic upper and middle classes boldly pressed their claims for representation in Parliament. The Presbyterians, clamorous for the abolition of tithes and Parliamentary reform, were also deeply infected with the democratic spirit of the French Revolution. Communicated to the peasantry, the new ideas of liberty assumed the inevitable form of an agrarian revolt. The Presbyterians, who aimed at first at an Irish Republic to be established by French aid, were driven over by the uprising of the peasants

to the side of Protestantism and repression ; and the country was plunged once more into a murderous conflict of class and creed. In 1783 the Irish Protestants had turned the embarrassments of England to their own profit. In 1798 England repaid them in their own coin. The experiment of an independent Irish Parliament, partly, no doubt, because it was never fully tried, had led to a civil war of atrocious virulence. Legislative union was now resolved upon. The Catholic priesthood and gentry, buoyed up with the hope that it would be followed by their political emancipation, state provision for the clergy and a settlement of the tithe question, favoured it. The Catholic masses remained passive. The Episcopalians accepted it as inevitable. The Presbyterians made no sign, and only the citizens of Dublin and the Orangemen in the north can be said to have strongly opposed it. The Irish House of Commons fought, indeed, for its life and its privileges with the tenacity both of patriots and of hucksters, but its resistance was overborne by a lavish creation of peerages and liberal compensation to the patrons of pocket-boroughs. Pitt "bought the fee-simple of Irish corruption," and the Union of Great Britain and Ireland became again a fact.

The eighteenth century established in Ireland the social, religious, territorial and political ascendancy of an alien minority ; the nineteenth century demolished it piece by piece and transferred its powers and privileges to the native masses.

The Union, by drawing Ireland into the stream of English progress and Irishmen into the arena of English politics, doomed oligarchy to extinction. The country acquired a leverage on English opinion that she had never before possessed and that her representatives in the House of Commons were to prove supremely capable of utilising. In the last hundred years nearly every emblem of the old regime has disappeared. After an agitation which for the first time brought the Irish priesthood into popular politics and instilled into the masses a real consciousness of unity, O'Connell wrested Catholic Emancipation from the British Government under the fear of civil war. Seven years of agrarian rebellion, marked by many outrages and comprising among its agencies of intimidation the terrible weapon of the boycott, forced an abolition of the tithes. A system of primary education, national in scope, though anything but national in spirit and intention, was established a generation before England herself received it. A Poor Law—preposterously unsuited, it is true, to Irish conditions—was passed to cope with the appalling growth of mendicancy and distress. Irish Catholics began to be appointed to high office under the British Crown. The municipalities were reformed and their administration passed for the most part into Catholic hands. The disestablishment of the Irish Protestant Church did much to assuage sectarian bitterness. The franchise was greatly extended. Local govern-

ment in town and country was handed over to popularly elected bodies and ceased to be the preserve and plaything of an exclusive class.

By these measures the dominant Protestantism of the old order was stripped of much of its social and of nearly all its political and religious authority. But the true seat of power lay in the ownership of the land, and from that, too, the party of ascendancy has by now been all but completely ejected. The Union at first seemed rather to aggravate than relieve the agrarian problem. When London became, and Dublin ceased to be, the capital of Ireland, large numbers of the gentry were attracted across the Channel, absenteeism increased, and the Irish landlord became more than ever a mere rent-extractor. But the true causes of the misery of rural Ireland had nothing to do with it, and could neither be intensified nor removed by, an Act of Union. The peasants, always within arm's reach of famine, dependent for their subsistence upon a single precarious root, encouraged by their priests to contract early marriages, paying competitive rents and recklessly sub-dividing and sub-letting their land, multiplied with fearful rapidity. The fall in prices after the Napoleonic wars redoubled their wretchedness. The landlords who had created many small holdings in order to control the votes that went with them began consolidating their farms directly the forty-shilling freeholders were disfranchised, and many thousands of tenants were evicted in the process. A vast

number of agricultural labourers grew up without regular employment. Ireland became "a rabbit-warren of paupers and beggars." It only needed a failure of the potato crop to precipitate the inevitable calamity, and the potato crop failed not once, but in three successive seasons. Famine swooped upon the land, bringing pestilence in her train. A million people died in a few years from starvation and disease, and a million and a half more emigrated to the new World.

Henceforward a new impulse, fed from the fierce anger of the exiles in America, was to permeate Irish agitation and bring home to England that the Irish question was of more than domestic concern. A larger Ireland than Great Britain rules over grew up across the Atlantic to embitter and complicate Anglo-American relations, to offer a refuge to Irish misery, and to furnish the Irish struggle with sympathy, guidance and funds. In more ways than one the catastrophe of the famine proved the birth-throe of a new era. It killed for a while the demand for a repeal of the Union that O'Connell had carried to the last limit of peaceable agitation. It touched the conscience and humanity as much as it humiliated the pride of the English people. It was the means of concentrating upon Great Britain and the British connection much of the animosity that had hitherto been directed against the ascendancy class in Ireland. It fomented every agrarian disorder to a degree that at last awakened British statesmanship to the chief

source of Irish ills. The famine ruined a third of the Irish landlords. The sale of their bankrupt estates brought in a new type of speculative proprietors with no other interest than that of dragging from the land its last farthing of rent. At the same time the abolition of the corn laws destroyed the position that Ireland had held for seventy years as "England's granary," and threw the people back upon pasture. From these two causes alone tens of thousands of evictions took place, bloodily revenged by murders, spasmodic outrages and at length by the Irish-American conspiracy of Fenianism.

It was not until democracy was installed in England that the Irish tenant found in the mingled fears and fair-mindedness of the English masses his best hope of justice. Forty years ago his status was still one of infamous subjection. None of the traditional amenities that mellowed the relationship of landlord and tenant in England obtained in Ireland. On the one side tyranny, born of racial and religious contempt, and nurtured on a long, untrammelled use of power; on the other side, the bitterness of dispossession, groaning under a mass of calculated injustice; and on both sides the memories of centuries of ferocious strife—prevented all true reciprocities of sympathy. Outside of Ulster the tenant, while carrying out at his own expense and by his own labour all the improvements on the land he rented, erecting the dwelling-house and out-offices, building the farm roads,

draining and fencing the estate, could yet be evicted at any moment and without a penny of compensation. So great a scandal could not permanently endure when once its existence became realised by the English democracy. First by decreeing that compensation should be paid to an out-going tenant, both for improvements and in the event of his eviction for any cause but the non-payment of a reasonable rent; secondly, by legalising a dual ownership in the land—a landlord's interest and a tenant's interest—by appointing a judicial body to determine a fair rent, and by securing to the tenant fixity of tenure and the right of free sale of his interest; and thirdly, when it was clear that these expedients had broken down, by passing successive Acts that enabled the tenants through a free use of state credit to expropriate the landlords and become the absolute owners of the soil—the British Parliament in the last five-and-thirty years has struck Irish landlordism to the ground, and has changed the whole aspect of the agrarian problem. That history in the long run is justice was never better proved than in the tangled tale of Irish land tenure. Seven and a half centuries have reversed themselves in less than forty years, and the Celtic masses in another generation will be as they were before the Anglo-Norman invasion, the occupiers and possessors of the Irish soil.

But this great revolution, now working itself out to its predestined end, was not wrought

without a convulsion that for a while dislocated the whole framework of Irish society. Fearful outrages on man and beast, the terrorism of the Land League, repression on the one side and a many-linked confederacy of crime on the other, marked all but the final stage of its accomplishment, and penetrated the Irish mind with the conviction that England would yield to agitation what she would refuse to justice. Parnell gave to the hostility against British rule a fresh and formidable intensity by grafting the demand for autonomy on to the movement for agrarian reform. By a skilful use of obstruction he reduced the British House of Commons to anarchy. He converted the leader of a great English party to the justice and expediency of Home Rule, but he failed to convert the British people. It has been left for our own generation to settle the extent to which the principle of associating the Irish people with the conduct of their own affairs is to be carried.

For the rest, the nineteenth century witnessed profound changes in the conditions of the Irish question. It saw the downfall of ascendancy and the steady equalisation of the two races and the two creeds. It raised the Catholic Church to a height of secular authority unsurpassed in history and fraught with consequences, both present and to come, of the most far-reaching character. It vastly increased the wellbeing of the people, presided over a triumphant extension of manufactures in the

north, and, by the introduction of railways and the employment of State aid, promoted a general advance in material comfort and civilisation. It is now only along portions of the Atlantic seaboard, in the barren and backward west, that one encounters traces of the old penury and squalor. Moreover, since the Union, Ireland, while never pacified, has been comparatively pacific. Distracted by incessant unrest, she has still escaped the devastating wars of the three preceding centuries. At the same time four millions of her people have left her shores, and the condition of the majority of those who have remained behind, while unmistakably better than it was a hundred years ago, is still lamentably deficient. The soil has passed rapidly out of cultivation and the peasantry, baptised in agitation and played upon by the excitements of an all-pervading politics, face the responsibilities of ownership with hardly more than a minimum of capital, technical skill, application or industrial habits. While almost wholly Anglicised in speech, dress and customs, the masses of the people retain their instinctive repugnance to English government and their inherited dislike of British criminal law; while the landowning nobility and gentry, both Catholic and Protestant, have as steadily lost their old Irish character and feeling and are now perhaps more than ever regarded as an alien class, battling with desperate tenacity for the last remnants of a supremacy once absolute and unchallenged. Taxation has

enormously increased; government is wasteful and antipathetic to the mass of the people; education in all its grades is un-Irish, starved, misdirected and incomplete; the deep cleavages of class and creed are still painfully evident; a true sense of Irish nationality has yet to be born. Ireland remains as ever the land of paradoxes and problems. But a new spirit is stirring within her, and some new and potent forces are at work that hold within them the promise of a vast and beneficent transformation.

CHAPTER II

A GENERAL SURVEY

A COUNTRY and a people with such a history as I have sketched must needs be abnormal. Most of the evils that have afflicted Ireland may, indeed, as has often been pointed out, be paralleled, one by one, in the case of other nations ; but in Ireland alone have they operated in conjunction and simultaneously, or with only so brief a break in their consecutive malignity as gave neither time nor opportunity for recovery or escape. There is no one cause, just as there is no one remedy, for Irish ills. Geographical isolation and an enforced national exclusiveness need not in themselves have differentiated Ireland any more, for instance, than they have differentiated Norway. Other countries have been as bitterly torn by the clash of racial strife. The vitality of tribalism in Ireland finds an even exaggerated counterpart in the persistence of the clan system in the Scottish Highlands. Conquest, followed by the eviction of the natives from the soil and by their social, legal and political repression, has been one of the most common phenomena of European history. A soft and sensuous climate, a lack of mineral resources and

a preponderance of pasture have not prevented other lands from developing an industrial spirit in prosperity and contentment. The commercial restrictions imposed upon Ireland in the eighteenth century were nothing exceptional. Religious persecution, though in Ireland it assumed the unique and peculiarly revolting form of the persecution of a majority by a minority, has ravaged nearly every Continental country for far longer periods and with immeasurably greater savagery. The drainage of emigration, the secular ascendancy of Catholicism, the instability of party government, inadequate education, a continued stress of political agitation, an almost chronic scarcity among the masses, and the agricultural revolution wrought by Free Trade—not one of these is a factor peculiar to Ireland alone. It is their concurrence, the fatality of their combination in Ireland, the interplay of all of them at once or in breathless succession that constitute the distinctive tragedy of Irish history. Had they come singly or at long intervals their effects might have been thrown off. Coming, as they did, in close-pressed and devastating battalions, with little or no chance for the recuperative principle to resist their convergent sweep, they have infected the whole body politic and left a penetrating mark, not only upon the structure of Irish society, but upon the character and mental instincts of the Irish people.

It is a commonplace of observation that there are two Irelands, and, as with most commonplaces,

its significance is somewhat blunted by repetition. Not until one travels through the country, observing and cross-examining, does the phrase assume the meaning and proportions of a fact. There are, indeed, two Irelands, divided from each other by barrier upon barrier. It is not alone that nearly three-fourths of the people are Roman Catholics, while the remainder belong to one or other of the Protestant sects. It is not alone that among the Catholics the Celtic strain has curiously persisted, while the Protestants approach more nearly the Lowland Scotch and the English types. It is not alone that Catholic Ireland, speaking broadly, is poor and agricultural, and Protestant Ireland prosperous and industrial, or that the majority feel themselves to be the true natives of the soil, while the minority still retain something of the spirit of a superior colonising caste, or that there should lie between them seven centuries of social, religious and agrarian strife, or that on the master question of Irish politics they should still irreconcilably differ. Not one of these elements of separation and contentiousness, taken by itself, would have sufficed to give the visitor his curious consciousness of passing in and out between two worlds, almost between two civilizations, each unintelligible and repugnant to the other.

What makes up the full sum of the uniqueness of Ireland is that the factors of antagonism and discord, by the diabolical chance of history,

coincide with and reinforce instead of cancelling each other. Class distinctions in Ireland are not mitigated by political agreement; differences of creed are not assuaged by a harmony of economic interests; the cleavages of racial temperament are not, as in other countries they are, bridged over by a sense of national unity. On the contrary, all the bitternesses of caste and creed, of political and material antipathies and contrasts, instead of losing half their viciousness in a multiplicity of cross-currents, are gathered and rigidly compressed in Ireland into two incongruous channels. Throughout the country you infer a man's religion from his social position, his social position from his religion, and his views on all Irish questions from both. The inference, to be sure, is not invariably correct. There is still left a remnant of the old Catholic nobility and gentry whose political sympathies have nothing in common with those of the great bulk of their co-religionists. In Dublin, the "Castle" Catholic, the Catholic, that is, who has identified himself with the English system of government and with the social circle that centres on the Viceregal Lodge, is a common enough type; nor is it by any means the case that Catholic landlords have had less trouble with their tenants, or have been less exposed to agrarian outrage, than Protestants. The struggle for the land in Ireland has always evoked an intensity of feeling that has overridden the claims of religious and political communion,

and the agitating Protestant tenant is as familiar in Ulster as the oppressive Catholic landlord in Kerry or Wexford. Nor is it here alone that the two Irelands cross and merge. There are several thousand Protestants in Ulster who are the staunchest and most determined of Home Rulers. About a sixth of the Irish Nationalist Party at Westminster is composed of Protestants, and it is a remarkable and significant fact that, with the exception of O'Connell, nearly all the great leaders of the Irish nation during the past century and a quarter have belonged to the Church of the minority.

But, in spite of an overlapping at this point and at that, the two Irelands remain not deliberately, still less defiantly, but instinctively separate. The social and religious cleavage runs sheer down to the foundations. It is buttressed and perpetuated by the policy of the Catholic Church, and the Protestants, for their part, show no real inclination to break it down. The members of the two faiths are educated almost altogether apart; they may mingle in after-life in business or politics or the professions, but for all social purposes they retain a mutually exclusive aloofness; there is little bigotry, except in Londonderry and Belfast, but on the other hand there is little intimacy. As a general rule, Protestants and Catholics in Ireland do not intervisit or hold any genuine intercourse together. In the social clubs, you will hardly find one member of the old faith to every score

or fifty of the new ; and that is not because sectarian intolerance penetrates further in Ireland than elsewhere, or even because the profession of the one creed or the other carries with it historical implications and significances of wider import than in any other land, but because the two sects are for the most part restricted to different social levels. Throughout Ireland the upper classes are all but exclusively Protestants. Their old political ascendancy has been torn from them, but their social and industrial supremacy remains. You soon come to take it for granted, when passing from one village to another, that the "big house" of the neighbourhood is owned by a Protestant. You soon learn to be surprised, on making the circuit of the towns, if you find a single one of the principal industries in Catholic hands. The small tradesman, the retail shopkeeper, may be a Catholic ; the publican almost invariably is ; but the large manufacturer, the bank manager, the railway director, the shipbuilder, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, is a Protestant.

And, whether in town or country, the Protestants form inevitably an aloof and self-contained coterie of their own, feeling themselves in character, education, culture, and enterprise the members of both a superior class and a superior civilization. The upper classes among them, the landlords and the gentry, distinguished beyond any other body of men by the numbers of their titles, whose origin the tactful visitor

will refrain from inquiring into, hardly regard themselves as Irish at all. Their eyes are turned Englandwards; they speak of "the people," even when with the utmost kindness, much as an Indian civil servant might speak of the natives around him; they carry with them the consciousness of an eternal separateness; they have chosen, in short, to be English instead of Irish and Imperialists instead of Nationalists. For that choice they will stand eternally condemned by history, but history will also remember that few classes of men have ever developed a more winning or virile type of character, or have produced a greater number of gifted soldiers and administrators. As an aristocracy, they must be held to have failed, to have failed so badly that they have had to be bought out; but as individuals among a leader-loving people they have still, if they will only seize it, a part of immense utility and beneficence to play in Irish life. Their relations with those about and below them, while frequently marked with a great outward friendliness and sympathy and much charitable zeal, lack altogether those amenities, that basis of mutual attachment, that placid revolution round the feudal centre, which have been the strength of the English squirearchy. Throughout rural Ireland, the sense of common interests between class and class seems almost to have perished. And, even among the great manufacturers of the North, all of whom, without, so far as I know, a single exception, are

Protestants, one finds the same aggressive aloofness. Trade, as a rule, is a potent antiseptic to mitigate the poison of political and sectarian feuds ; but fate has so willed it that the magnificent industries of Londonderry and Belfast should find in Ireland their workshop but not their market. Their business is almost altogether an exporting one, and this unquestionably has been a factor of considerable moment in preventing a true understanding between North and South, and in keeping the two classes, races and creeds, apart. One comes at last, as Mr. Stephen Gwynn has justly observed, to accept it as almost normal that Protestants and Catholics, when they meet at all in Ireland, should do so in one or other of the innumerable relations of employer and employed. There is, of course, the exception of sport, and especially of such sports as have to do with horseflesh. What the Irishman does not know about horses is hidden even from the Afghan or the New-Englander, and in the buying, selling, training, racing and hunting of horses there is probably more unforced mingling of the classes and creeds than in all other connections put together.

But while in Ireland the Protestants, though numbering only a quarter of the population, are thus socially, territorially and industrially in the ascendant, their political power has been whittled down to almost nothing. Of the 103 members who represent Ireland in the House of Commons, only about 20 are Unionists—and Unionists

and Protestants, with the deductions I have already touched on, are roughly synonymous. There are thirty-three county councils in Ireland. In fourteen of them the Unionists have not a single representative; in eight they have only one apiece; in twenty-seven, out of a total of 780 councillors, the Unionists are no more than 23; and in the whole thirty-three they are outnumbered by more than six to one. In the towns and cities it is just the same. The whole machinery of local administration, in fact, outside Ulster, is in the hands of men whose chief claim to election is that they are Nationalists in sentiment, and who represent neither the wealth nor the experience nor the best brains and capacity of the country. The Unionists complain bitterly of their exclusion, but I cannot see what other fate they could possibly have expected. A majority long harassed and thwarted, often persecuted, always looked down upon, finds itself in sudden possession of political power. What can be more inevitable than that they should use that power against those who have oppressed them in the past, and who still retain most of the characteristics of an alien and dominant caste? An impartial student of Irish history can only, I think, marvel that the retribution should be so slight. Exclusion from nine-tenths of the local administration of the country is, after all, but a mild penalty for the numberless crimes committed against Irish well-being by the British "garrison." Human nature could

hardly be satisfied with less ; historical justice might well demand more.

The local Nationalist bodies are indeed frequently grotesque enough. They pass the most flamboyant resolutions on matters with which they have not the least concern ; their debates and their manner of conducting them are often uproariously comical ; they " play politics " with a tireless assiduity ; most of their appointments are friendly, good-natured " jobs," and they restrict the offices in their gift almost entirely to Catholics and Nationalists. But, when they can be induced to attend to their proper business, they carry it through with a quite adequate efficiency. Irish county government is decidedly better to-day under popular county councils than it was fifteen years ago under the grand juries in which Protestants and Unionists almost exclusively predominated. There is no religious persecution ; there is no discrimination in the matter of rates ; the Irish peasant and the Irish farmer are even keener than most men on seeing that they get their money's worth ; and the general ostracism of the upper classes is due not to their religious but to their social and political creed. I am persuaded that that ostracism is not a permanent condition. Many movements are at work to break it down ; but, for the present, it is sufficiently effective to deprive the 250,000 odd Unionists in the three southern provinces of practically all share in both local and Parliamentary government.

It is not, however, on any local issue, but on the penetrating problems of the land and of Home Rule, that the two Irelands part most decisively. The genius of Michael Davitt, by linking the agrarian question with the national question, the desire for more land with the desire for self-government, incalculably reinforced the intensity of both demands. No one can yet say positively whether the Irish agitation for autonomy is or is not a self-sufficing movement, or what vitality it will possess when deprived of the agrarian tumult and unrest which for thirty years and more have been its backbone. There is at present a peace in the country such as Ireland has not known for more than a century. Landlordism is being expropriated; a peasant proprietorship is being evolved; before another twenty years have passed the work of seven and a half centuries will have been undone, and the soil of Ireland will have been handed back to its original owners. So gigantic a revolution raises some profound and many-sided issues, but, for the present, I must content myself with a few general observations. The great scheme of land purchase which is now in operation will have settled, when completed, one question only, the land-tenure question. It has been the curse of Irish history that rent and ownership should hitherto have absorbed the agricultural energies of the country. How much could be got out of the land has been of little account compared with how little could be paid for it;

and the concentration of both landlords and tenants upon the sole issue of rent has been morally and technically disastrous to true agricultural progress. That issue is now by way of being determined; the tenant, by the lavish help of State credit, is being converted into a freeholder. This means, of course, that the main source of internal strife is being dammed at the fountain-head. But it also means that the Irish peasant and the Irish farmer are brought for the first time face to face with the realities of a competitive agricultural existence, and that their well-being from now onwards depends on their own labour and efficiency. The policy of land purchase, in short, has cleared the ground, has laid the foundations of a new social order, has brought or is bringing a long and vitiating conflict to a close.

But the restoration of agrarian peace, while an essential condition of agricultural prosperity, is very far from being prosperity itself; and, even if it were not complicated in Ireland by an infinity of cross-currents, it could not in the nature of things do more than provide an opportunity, an opportunity which it rests wholly with the people themselves to neglect and stultify or to make the most and best of. Nothing, therefore, could be more fantastic than to suppose that the mere transfer of title-deeds in the soil from landlord to tenant has induced, or by itself can ever induce, the Irish millennium. Moreover, it will take, as I have said, twenty

years at the lowest estimate, to complete the transfer itself. There are many landlords who have refused to sell under the Wyndham Act, and to these some form of compulsion will have to be applied. Again, in the stagnant and desolate West, where the best land is given up to stock-raising and the peasants lead a life of appalling destitution on their wretched five-acre holdings of bog and stony moor, there is a fierce agitation for the partition of the grazing lands. The presence and the pressure of some 150,000 agricultural labourers are likewise pretty certain in the future to make themselves felt. We have not, therefore, by any means seen the last of agrarian unrest and possibly of agrarian outrage in Ireland. The peace of which I have spoken is relative only. It may not again be broken in the old convulsive fashion, with the murder of landlords and their agents, the houghing of cattle, boycotting and arson, and an entire society thrust by every ingenious weapon of organised terrorism into a condition little short of anarchy. Ireland at large has advanced beyond that stage; but what is true of the country as a whole is not true of every section in it. Here and there, in this locality and in that, the "bad times" may be again reproduced on a smaller scale, in a more modified form, but with effects not less ruinous and demoralising than of old.

More than any country I am acquainted with, more even than Poland itself, Ireland is a network of "organisations," leagues, societies, factions

and cliques. Almost every department of life seems to be on a committee basis; individual action and individual opinion are everywhere marshalled in subservience to the interests of this movement or of that. There is, perhaps, no land in which there is more volubility of speech and less real liberty of thought, and, as a consequence, less democracy than in Ireland. A genius for combination penetrates to the lowest strata, is indeed among the peasantry almost an instinct, and an instinct cultivated with more than Sicilian aptitude. The associative qualities innate in tribalism and fostered by centuries of repressive government and by the impulse of class and racial warfare have blossomed into a talent for concerted agitation such as even the most professional of American politicians might envy. Indeed, just as on its religious side Irish life to-day curiously suggests the Spain of three hundred years ago, so the scheme and spirit of Irish politics have the unmistakable flavour of modern America. The Irish emigrant to the United States is a graduate in all the arts of Tammany Hall before he lands; the rigging of conventions, the theory and practice of "pull," the whole science of manipulating opinion, he has learned and applied at home. But, whereas Tammany Hall confines itself mainly to politics, its essential principle takes on in Ireland a far wider sweep and embraces not only politics, but the land and the private and social as well as the public life of the people. Mr. Stephen Gwynn

has even remarked that "it would be hardly too much to say that Catholics in Ireland form among themselves—without intention and even without knowledge—a huge secret society, like all secret societies amenable to a special code." There are villages and towns in Ireland by the score where the spirit of faction works much as it worked among Guelfs and Ghibellines and Montagus and Capulets, where the streets are apt at times to ring with the blows of contending rivalries, and where little or nothing is done or attempted without reference to the desires and susceptibilities of this or that group.

And the whole field of politics, which through the intimacy of its connection with the land yields the people their main occupation, has been, I need hardly say, meticulously surveyed and parcelled out. The landlords, quite apart from the Orange Society in the North, have their own federations for mutual assistance, for providing, for instance, caretakers on farms from which the tenants have been evicted, for furnishing the sinews of war in the protection of their class interests, and for deluging England with lecturers, leaflets, and peripatetic orators in support of Unionist principles. But, naturally, it is among the masses of the Nationalists that organisation has been most developed. Such a body as the United Irish League, which has a branch in pretty nearly every town and village in the country, and works the whole machinery of political and agrarian agitation, is a far more

effective power than the British Government, and its decrees command an obedience that is not always yielded to the King's writ. There are at least a dozen other organisations on a smaller scale, but of a similar character, some purely political, some confined, in the main, to the interests of a section or a class—the town tenants, for example, or the agricultural labourers—some literary or athletic or industrial or “benevolent,” but all strongly imbued with the sentiment of Nationalism, and all carrying on a vigorous propaganda. The most powerful of them, of course, are those that are linked with the agrarian question ; for while Nationalism in Ireland is a sentiment, the land is life, and anything that touches the land touches also the mainspring of Irish existence. An eviction is still the signal for something in the nature of a local uprising ; the “land-grabber” who rents a farm from which the previous tenant was expelled is still a marked man ; and juries, unless carefully packed by the Crown, still refuse to convict any man who is charged with an agrarian outrage. The landlords are by no means the only, in these days are not even the chief, sufferers by the action of these various organisations. There is a sense in which Ireland may really be compared with Macedonia. The Macedonian problem underwent two phases. In the first phase, the Turks preyed on the Christians ; in the second, the Christians preyed on one another. So in

Ireland the old conflict between the Catholic, Irish and Nationalist tenant and the Protestant, Unionist and Anglicised landlord has pretty well ended ; and in its place has arisen a bitter internecine warfare among the Irish themselves, a warfare in which the contestants on each side seek to turn the power of the United Irish League against their enemies. An unpopular member of a local branch of the League, or one who has offended the local trader and publican who, with the priest, dictates its policy, or one who has sinned against the unwritten agrarian code of the neighbourhood, or who belongs to a faction that has fallen under the displeasure of another and more powerful faction, is just as likely to be boycotted and intimidated, to have his business ruined, his supplies cut off, his cattle driven, his crops trampled, and his comings and goings attended by a mob blowing horns, as was ever a landlord or his agent in the worst days of the Land League. It is one of the first things to be realised about Ireland that coercion, in some form or other, is the rule of life, and that, as organised opinion in a country so torn with internal feuds is always extreme opinion, men of moderate views and peaceable inclinations are overborne and silenced. With but a slight variance of degree, this holds good for both Unionist and Nationalist Ireland, and opinion in Belfast and Portadown is scarcely less tyrannised over by the Orange Society than in Mayo or

Galway by the United Irish League. "Terror and greed," I remember being told by the only impartial man I have ever come across in Ireland, a priest, a Nationalist, yet a most candid and clear-eyed observer—"Terror and greed—those are the operative forces of Irish life and politics."

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTRY AND ITS PROBLEMS

THE stage on which the tragi-comedy of Irish life is enacted is an island some three-fifths the size of England. It is a country of soft, melancholy, almost depressing beauty, piteously eloquent of its hapless history. I know indeed of no land where the consciousness of humanity so colours the aspects of nature, where the thought of the past and all its mournfulness, of the strivings, failures, and crimes of the dead and the living, so insistently obtrudes on the contemplation of mountain, lake and moor. On the luscious spreading pasture-lands of Meath and Kildare, where the bullock has made a solitude and called it prosperity; among the vast panoramas of heathery, stony, desolate hills in Kerry, with their gaunt, unconquered look; on the great treeless limestone plain that holds the centre of Ireland; in the heart of such miniature Paradises as Glengariff and Killarney, where all is rich with an exotic luxuriance; amid the islands off the the southwest coast, where the Gulf Stream flows and tree-ferns, palms, bamboo and eucalyptus grow in the open air; gazing on some

50 The Country and its Problems

rolling, stormswept expanse of peat-bog ; among the jagged, flint-strewn headlands of Connemara and Donegal, that throw their shadow over the prismatic buffetings of the Atlantic ; fishing on one or other of the countless lakes ; at the sight of a ruined and abandoned farmhouse where, perhaps, some victim of the famine lay down to die—always and everywhere one feels the brooding presence of the lives that have been lived, of the history made and of the problems they have remorselessly bequeathed. The appeal of Ireland's beauty has in it a recurring undertone of wildness and tragedy.

To the trim and cultivated aspects of England, where all angles and corners have been smoothed away, the contrast she offers is complete. Her gray-green monotone has little or none of the variegated colourings that make the plump and smiling sister-isle a patch-work quilt. Her very stillnesses are different from those of England ; they seem to tell, not of deep and rich placidity, of some happy cæsural pause, but of listlessness, despair, defeat. And the climate deepens the sense of forlornness. It is mild, humid, relaxing. Exposed to the full force of the southerly and westerly winds that blow from the Atlantic for nine months in every year, denuded of trees and almost wholly without any system of national drainage, Ireland is the predestined home of caressing rains, leaden and capricious skies, the sudden squall, and the soft, enfolding mist. Of the extremes of heat and cold she knows nothing ;

The Country and its Problems 51

frosts and droughts are equally foreign to her normal experience; the characteristic of her climate is an equable, enervating humidity. It is a climate that impresses the casual traveller as inviting to inertia, as congenial to a spirit of lethargic fatalism, and as encouraging, and indeed excusing, the use of artificial stimulants. Its economic as well as its mental and moral influence on the people is very great. It has given Ireland a soil of extraordinary fertility, the best grazing-lands in the world, an excess of moisture that is unfavourable to wheat, and only a little less so to barley, and an atmosphere peculiarly adapted for the bleaching of linens.

On this beautiful, romantic, depressing, rain-soaked, lake-riddled island lives a population of slightly over four million people. Seventy years ago they numbered eight millions; in seventy years, while the population of England and of Scotland has doubled, that of Ireland has been halved. And the appalling drain of emigration still continues, though with a lessening speed; every year sees from thirty to forty thousand men and women fleeing from the country. Moreover, as one would surmise, it is the young, the vigorous, the fit who go; the unfit who remain. Something over ninety per cent. of the emigrants are over ten and under forty-five years of age, and not ten per cent. of them transplant themselves under the British flag. But emigration on this unparalleled scale is more than a direct loss. The account is not closed

52 The Country and its Problems

when you reckon merely the numbers of those who go, or the economic efficiency withdrawn with them, or even the international consequences of their settlement in a competitive country. You have also to consider the indirect toll they levy on the mental and physical vitality of those who stay ; and what that toll amounts to the lunacy inspectors, the health statistics and the poor-law figures show but too plainly. The ratio of the insane per 10,000 of the population in England and Wales is 40.8, in Scotland 45.4, and in Ireland 56.2. Over 10,000 people die every year in Ireland from tuberculous disease—a rate per thousand almost double the figure for Ireland and Wales ; and one Irishman out of every forty-four is in receipt of rate aid. Moreover, the number of men and women over sixty-five years of age reaches the disastrous proportion of one in every eight of the population. Ireland is becoming a land of the aged and infirm, and of them alone. Her birth-rate is among the lowest in the world, a decimal point, and no more, higher than that of France ; the Ireland of early and prolific marriages is altogether a thing of the past.

A few more words have still to be added to round off my present purpose of conveying a rough impression of the general conditions of the people. Ireland, is, undoubtedly, a poor country, though the last quarter of a century has seen a slow but steady material progress. The average *per capita* income of the population

The Country and its Problems 53

has been estimated at £15, and in parts of the barren and desolate West it is probably considerably lower. The average wages of agricultural labourers, of whom there are in Ireland some 150,000, works out at from 12s. to 13s. a week. In the towns there are 79,000 tenements of one room occupied by over 230,000 people. In the country there are more than 10,000 cabins with only one window. Life in these hovels touches, perhaps, as low a state of civilisation as is to be found anywhere in Europe outside of Sicily. Of the hundreds that a traveller comes across, those which I saw in County Mayo may be taken as typical—a cluster of eight or nine cabins, wretchedly thatched, built of unhewn stone badly cemented, standing some fifty yards from the roadway in a scene of the bleakest desolation. The soil all about is hostile, meagre, and studded with gray rock and stone. The nearest village is five miles away. To reach the huts you walk up an unmade road that is half a ditch and half resembles a stone staircase after an earthquake, foul and reeking with mire and effluvia. By the side of the cabin doors are the inevitable manure heap and the winter stack of peat. As you pass into the doorway a flutter of fowls rushes out. The darkness is such that, except when silhouetted against the blazing hearth, you cannot at first make out who or what is there. Gradually three or four barefooted children reveal themselves, and an old man sitting motionless by the fire. Opposite the hearth, in a stall

54 The Country and its Problems

on fairly clean straw, is the family cow. The furniture, standing unevenly on the bare and sodden ground, is of the roughest. There is a tiny inner room where the father and mother sleep, the children herding together in the living-room. Two of them are coughing ominously; all have indigestion; their eyes are reddened with the peat smoke; and their teeth are abominable.

How, one asks, do people in such conditions live? They rent, or owe rent for, a patch of ground, growing on it oats and potatoes year after year, until the soil is worn out and the crops blighted. Some rough commonage grazing and the right of cutting a certain amount of turf for fuel go with their holding. But it is not upon the farm that they rely to make both ends meet. They may earn a little, but not enough, by the sale of a calf or pig or a few chickens; their main sources of income are harvesting in Ulster, Scotland and England, fishing, if they live on the coast, the weaving of homespun or some other cottage industry, and contributions from their relatives in America. But, above all, they contrive to exist by cutting down their standard of living to the lowest possible point. Milk, potatoes, tea, some American flour, and, as an occasional luxury, a slice or two of the worst American bacon form, with a little whiskey, their staple diet. There are over 100,000 holdings in Ireland where the conditions I have roughly glanced at more or less obtain. They are not

The Country and its Problems 55

of course, to be taken as typical of the whole country; and one must always bear in mind, as a shrewd German observer has put it, that "the power of existing under miserable conditions of life, of eking out an existence and of propagating his species on soil where a Central European goat would die of hunger, has doubtless preserved the Irish people during the long period of scorn and oppression," and has become, one may add, so much an instinct that probably no Irishman is really as poor as his appearance, surroundings and mode of life would lead one to infer.

The area of Ireland amounts to a trifle over 20,000,000 acres. Of these nearly 15,000,000 acres, representing about seven-eighths of the total arable land, are meadows or permanent pasture; some 3,000,000 acres are bog, townlands, barren mountain, water, woods and plantations; 1,250,000 acres are under corn crops, with oats overwhelmingly in the lead; another million acres are devoted to green crops, chiefly potatoes (591,000 acres) and turnips (270,000 acres), with mangles and cabbage far behind; flax accounts for 66,000 acres, and is apparently an increasing crop; and some 14,000 acres are planted with fruit. These figures tell their own tale. Taken in conjunction with the fact that in the last forty-five years, the number of milch cows has positively decreased while that of cattle under a year old has more than doubled, they prove that Ireland is a country not of farmers, but of stock-raisers.

56 The Country and its Problems

The Irish, indeed, have never been an agricultural people, nor are they to-day. They are cattle breeders and cattle speculators. Tillage, which hardly anywhere in Ireland is scientifically pursued, has become over large areas virtually a lost art. The national occupation of the people, the one to which their instincts overwhelmingly incline, is the rearing, selling, grazing and export of cattle. It is at once their business and their form of speculation. What the bucket-shop is in America and football and horse-racing in England, that is cattle in Ireland. The dowries of the peasant girls in the West are frequently reckoned in heads of stock; servants invest their savings in cattle, much as in Norway they invest them in boats. Ireland, indeed, from the agricultural point of view, is little more than a ranch for the rearing of cattle, more than half of which are "finished" in England, for the English market; and even her success in that line of industry depends very largely on the exclusion of Canadian and Argentine stock from the British ports. On the list of Irish exports of farm produce, of raw materials and of manufactured goods, live stock comes easily first; and among live stock it is the store cattle—cattle, that is, brought up young and unfinished by English dealers, taken over to England, and there grazed till they are ready for market—which, both in numbers and value, forms the leading item. In round figures the exports of Irish live stock amount to £15,500,000 a year. Of this sum nearly

The Country and its Problems 57

£7,000,000 is represented by store cattle, about £4,300,000 by fat cattle, £1,200,000 by sheep and lambs, £1,300,000 by pigs, and £1,400,000 by horses. And this immense and fundamentally unwholesome predominance of pasture over tillage, of cattle-rearing over farming, has some economic results of the most disastrous significance. It means, roughly speaking, that throughout Ireland the best land is given up to bullocks and the worst to men; that the richest soil is unpeopled and uncultivated, while from the poorest a population without capital or technical knowledge, or any sound agricultural instinct, strives with unremitting inefficiency to wring the bare means of livelihood; and it helps to explain why the Irish, when they emigrate, turn their backs on the country and settle overwhelmingly in the towns.

In Ireland itself there are very few towns of any consequence. Belfast, with a population of 350,000, Dublin with 370,000, Cork with 100,000, Limerick with 50,000, Londonderry with 40,000 and Waterford with 26,000 head and list; and there are four or five others with just over 10,000 inhabitants apiece. Altogether about a third of the total population of the country lives in the towns, which in Ireland as elsewhere, though by no means so rapidly, tend to grow at the expense of the rural districts. Except in the hard-headed and industrial North, they do not impress the visitor with the sense of energy and prosperity. Dublin is in many ways a pleasing, even a captivat-

58 The Country and its Problems

ing, city. It has that air and presence which no city which has once been a capital ever quite shakes off. As the seat of administration, the headquarters of justice, the centre of education, of art and letters, the old metropolis still attracts to itself the brightest intellects of the country and propagates a social atmosphere uniquely its own. But, even so, the life of the city is far from being the brilliant affair it was, and its slow economic decline has been even more pronounced. The time seems well in sight when a pint bottle of stout, bearing the name of Guinness, will be the sole as well as the foremost emblem of Dublin manufactures. Some air of a battle lost seems to brood over the city, and to touch its silent quays and rivers, its college and park, and its appalling slums with a sombre tone of decay. Waterford, though it possesses four good-sized bacon-curing establishments, is mainly occupied with the export of cattle and agricultural produce. Cork, an island and relaxing city, fringed with high-perched suburbs, boasting four miles of quays, is also chiefly concerned in the export of butter, cheese and eggs to Bristol and the Welsh ports. But she has indigenous industries of her own—breweries and distilleries, ship-yards, tanneries, flour-mills, chemical-manure works and textile factories; and, more than any other city in the South, she has laboured for the promotion of native industries. Limerick is the home of three of the largest bacon-curing firms in the country, and does, besides a considerable

The Country and its Problems 59

trade in milling, butter-making and lace ; but its prosperity is nothing like what it should be, and its noble position on the estuary of the Shannon, its nearness to the United States, and its equipment of quays, wharfage, graving and floating docks are advantages that have yet to be turned to the best account.

It is not until one reaches Londonderry and Belfast that one feels oneself in contact with the atmosphere and problems of a modern industrial city. Londonderry, with its large coasting trade, its linen industry, its fisheries, ship-yards, iron and brass foundries, flour mills, breweries and distilleries, gives out an instant impression of confidence, energy and success ; and the industrial record of Belfast, the Chicago of Ireland, constitutes one of the greatest and most inspiring achievements in the history of commerce. These two towns, in tone and spirit, in their social structure, their instinctive ways of looking at things, and their economic formation, stand in a category of their own, and have little or no affinity with Limerick, Cork, Waterford, or Dublin ; while the gap that separates them from the smaller urban centres, that except in Ireland would not for a moment aspire to the name of towns, is the gap of the entire industrial revolution. I know nothing more disheartening than the life and appearance of the average Irish townlet of three or five thousand people. A surplusage of churches and drinking dens ; no industries, no sports, no libraries ; littered, un-

60 The Country and its Problems

kempt streets lined with evil-smelling cottages ; no diversions except the assizes and an occasional fair, and the rare visit of a tenth-rate theatrical company ; a few Protestant families of position forming a tiny, exclusive, and thoroughly bored clique of their own, and around them the Catholic masses whetting their minds on the eternal game of faction—such are the common features of Irish existence in the minor urban centres.

They have little or no economic justification ; they are non-productive, parasitic, and they abjectly fail to gather round them any social or intellectual life. “ Our small Irish country towns,” the brilliant “ Æ ” has written, “ in their external characteristics, are so arid and unlovely that one longs for a lodge in some vast wilderness as a relief from the unbearable meanness. Better look out on boundless sand and boundless sky, on two immensities, than on these mean and straggling towns, these disreputable public houses, those uncleansed footways like miry manure yards. For if one has a soul and any love for beauty he must feel like an anarchist if he strays into an Irish country town, and must long for bombs to wreck and dynamite to obliterate. If we examine into the internal economy of these excrescences on the face of nature, we find for the most part they are absolutely non-productive. They create no wealth, they generate no civic virtues, certainly they manifest none. They are mainly the channels through which porter and whiskey

The Country and its Problems 61

run from breweries and distilleries into the human stomach; and whatever trade there is, is distributive only. There is no intellectual life in them. Hardly a country town has a book shop. . . . Towns ought to be conductors, catching the lightnings of the human mind and distributing them all round their area. The Irish country towns only develop mental bogs about them. We have grown so accustomed to these arid patches of humanity that we accept them in a hopeless kind of way, whereas we should rage and prophesy over them as the prophets of ancient Israel did over Tyre and Sidon."

The point I wish to develop and emphasise is that Ireland suffers from a lopsided national growth. Her industrial have failed to keep pace with her agricultural interests, and the interdependence of the two in the formation of a healthy national life is only just beginning to be recognised. There are many causes, natural and historical, to account for this. Ireland is poor in minerals, in coal especially. Her rivers, unlike the rivers of Italy, do not readily lend themselves to being harnessed. Her internal transit system is neither cheap, rapid, nor co-ordinated; and she lies within a few hours' steaming of one of the most highly industrialized nations in the world. Moreover, in the dark days of Protection, England deliberately strangled her nascent manufactures. Woollens, glass, cotton, sail-cloth, sugar-refining, shipping, all

62 The Country and its Problems

went—crushed out by legislation. Ireland has never recovered from that succession of staggering blows. They killed not merely her industries, but something far more valuable; they killed, or at least fatally impaired, the industrial instinct, and the character, the aptitudes and the kind of self-discipline and of self-confidence that are essential to industrial progress. Over two-thirds of Ireland it is not too much to say that the problem of creating new industries or reviving old ones is a moral, even more than it is a technical or an economic, problem.

It is interesting in this connection to recall Mr. Lecky's observations on the influence of industrialism in promoting truthfulness, mutual confidence and fidelity to engagements. Among an industrial people, he remarks, veracity tends to be regarded as one of the first of virtues, and to be used as a decisive test, distinguishing a good from a bad man. "This constitutes," he proceeds, "probably the chief moral superiority of nations pervaded by a strong industrial spirit over nations like the Italians, the Spaniards, or the Irish, among whom that spirit is wanting. The usual characteristic of the latter nations is a certain laxity or instability of character, a proneness to exaggeration, a want of truthfulness in little things, an infidelity to engagements from which an Englishman, educated in the habits of industrial life, readily infers a complete absence of moral principle. But a larger philosophy and a deeper experience dispel

The Country and its Problems 63

his error. He finds that where the industrial spirit has not penetrated, truthfulness rarely occupies in the popular mind the same prominent position in the catalogue of virtues. It is not reckoned among the fundamentals of morality, and it is possible, and even common, to find in these nations—what would be scarcely possible in an industrial society—men who are habitually dishonest and untruthful in small things, and whose lives are nevertheless influenced by a deep religious feeling, and adorned by the consistent practice of some of the most difficult and most painful virtues. Trust in Providence, content and resignation in extreme poverty and suffering, the most genuine amiability and the most sincere readiness to assist their brethren, an adherence to their religious opinions which no persecutions and no bribes can shake, a capacity for heroic, transcendent, and prolonged self-sacrifice, may be found in some nations in men who are habitual liars and habitual cheats.”

But while the absence of industrialism has undoubtedly contributed to certain defects of the Irish character, and while these defects in turn hamper the development of manufactures, I believe that in this respect, as in many others, Ireland has turned the corner, and that with the subsidence of agrarian unrest, the spread of technical instruction, the increasing spirit of independence and initiative, the new turn of the Irish mind towards the concrete and the constructive, and the manifest revival of confidence

64 The Country and its Problems

in the future of the country, the growth of industries subsidiary to, or connected with, agriculture, is neither impossible nor improbable. The average Irish consumer is slowly being educated out of his belief that nothing good can come out of Ireland in the way of manufactures, and the farmer of the rising generation is no longer so abjectly set on doing as his neighbour does, but will on occasion use his own judgment. The whole movement of industrial recreation, indeed, is emerging from the semi-fashionable, semi-philanthropic phase, and is getting on to a practical and business-like basis. There is plenty of room for its expansion. It is on the face of it a suggestive anomaly that a country like Ireland, with some seventy million pounds in her joint-stock and savings banks, and her enormous wealth of cattle, sheep, and pigs should be importing every year over £1,800,000 of boots and shoes, over £200,000 of soap, £91,000 of candles, nearly £60,000 of saddlery, and over £1,200,000 of woollen goods. And it is a still greater anomaly that she should be paying out every year some £600,000 for fertilisers, at least as much for agricultural implements and machinery, over £1,600,000 for bacon, about £600,000 for butter and margarine, nearly £250,000 for apples, pears, onions and potatoes, and over £170,000 for preserves. Ireland, indeed, is in the curious position of importing almost as much farm produce and food stuffs as she exports. She sends abroad £30,000,000 of these commodities

The Country and its Problems 65

and takes in over £20,000,000 of them every year.

A few more words may be added to bring out the character and extent of Ireland's foreign trade. It amounts to £130,000,000 a year, and is equally divided between imports and exports. Of the latter farm produce, food and drink stuffs account for 54 per cent., raw materials for 6 per cent., and manufactured goods—principally textiles—for 40 per cent. Of the imports farm produce, food and drink stuffs represent 36 per cent., raw materials 15 per cent., and manufactured goods 49 per cent. About 90 per cent. of Ireland's trade lies with Great Britain. Reckoning by values, Ireland sends to the British market three times as much live stock as is imported from all other countries; her export of butter, while only a third of what Great Britain receives from Denmark, is the second largest on the list; in the matter of eggs only Russia is ahead of her; she supplies Great Britain with by far the greater part of her imported poultry; as regards bacon and hams, she is some distance behind the United States and Denmark, but well ahead of Canada; she is easily, so far as quantity is concerned, Great Britain's leading source of supply for potatoes; and she holds the fourth place as an exporter of oats. And if the British market is thus invaluable to Ireland, the Irish market is not less profitable to Great Britain. Probably very few people realise that Ireland is Great Britain's best customer, taking from her

66 The Country and its Problems

in goods and produce not only more, but very considerably more, than any other country in the world. Probably fewer still realise that, as measured by the value of her exports—in Ireland's case an unusually safe criterion—it is the farm and not the factory that produces the bulk of Irish wealth. If the statistics of the internal as well as the external trade were available, if there were anything like a census of production in Ireland, the preponderance of agriculture over industry in the material as well as in the social and political fortunes of the country would be still more clearly established.

Meanwhile it is of the utmost importance to grasp the determinating facts of Ireland's economic condition. They are, briefly, that her greatest industry, agriculture, has taken the speculative form of stock-raising; so that, as has been intimated, the best land is thus monopolised by cattle and the inferior land alone left over for men; that except in the North, and on a meagre and more or less tentative scale in a few scattered ports, manufactures scarcely exist; that for those defeated in the battle for an agricultural livelihood there are left, in consequence, hardly any openings in the towns; and that the economic movement, which in happier and better-balanced countries takes the form of migration from the rural districts to the urban centres, thus assumes in Ireland the disastrous shape of emigration. Two vital problems emerge from these conditons. One is the problem of devising a system of farming

The Country and its Problems 67

that will keep as many men as possible on the soil in a position of comfort and of economic independence. The other is the correlated problem of checking emigration by the encouragement of minor industries.

Inseparably bound up with these problems is the question of transportation. Among the causes of Ireland's industrial backwardness that are not historical or innate, I should be inclined to give the first place to the railway system. Without cheap, rapid, and co-ordinated means of transit and communication, I do not see how either Irish agriculture or Irish industries can be put on a sound footing. The railway question seems to me in this connection to be pretty nearly fundamental. There are in Ireland 4,602 miles of track, including sidings and light railways—that is to say, from about 200 to about 1,300 miles less than are owned by each of the four great English companies. To manage the Irish system there are at least twenty-six boards of directors and seventeen principal companies. The rolling stock is grotesquely inadequate; freight rates for merchandise are more than a third higher than in England, and are positively on the increase; passenger fares are still more excessive, the whole system is ill-connected and unenterprising, and the preferential through rates, the grip of the English companies, and the strangling of canal competition have made the Irish railways, one might almost say, as much the enemies as the friends of Irish progress. We are brought here face to face

68 The Country and its Problems

with a problem of extreme local urgency, that the British Parliament has neither the time nor the knowledge to attend to, and that cannot be taken in hand by any Irish authority, because no Irish authority with the necessary powers and organisation for dealing with it exists. It will be one of the first, the most momentous, and the most intricate questions confronting the Irish Parliament of the future.

There is nothing, again, more vital to the well-being of a nation than its educational system. Ireland has no educational system ; it has merely an educational chaos. The defects of the primary schools may be seen on the very surface of the statistics. With about the same population as Scotland, Ireland has about twice as many schools and over 3,500 more head teachers. The inference that she is therefore twice as well educated is not, however, a sound one. The Irish percentage of illiteracy is twelve times as high as the Scottish figure. The explanation of these anomalies is very simple. The fierce and historic conflict of sects in Ireland has stimulated each denomination to provide its own schools. Thus, in a village just capable of supporting one good school you will find two, three and sometimes four. The Church of England will have one, the Presbyterians another, and the Catholics will require two—one for the boys and one for the girls. In this way a total of nearly nine thousand schools is easily reached. Over five thousand of them are attended by pupils of one sect only,

The Country and its Problems 69

and in the remainder one faith or the other is usually in a great majority, a "conscience clause" protecting the religious susceptibilities of the minority. The results are that the Irish primary schools, being far in excess of the requirements of the population, are among the worst built and the worst equipped; their management is wholly in the hands of the clergy; their teachers are miserably paid; the children play truant two days out of every five; and each successive generation is insensibly familiarized with the idea that sectarian exclusiveness is one of the natural conditions of civilised life.

Redundant schools, starved and ill-taught teachers, clericalism in unchallenged control, an almost total lack of local interest, a curriculum wholly divorced from the economic needs and realities of the country, and, to crown all, a National Board of educational amateurs, nominated by Dublin Castle, insensible to Irish ideas and representations, deliberating in secret and decreeing without either consultation or explanation—such are the outstanding features of the Irish "system" of elementary education. Nor are the secondary schools in much better plight. There are in Ireland very few of those noble endowments which are the glory of England and America. The connection between the primary and the intermediate schools is ludicrously imperfect, the latter being managed by an independent Board of their own, whose chief contribution to Irish education is a costly extension

70 The Country and its Problems

of the pernicious system of payment by results. With technical instruction only a beginning has been made; and all that one need say of the state of higher education is that whatever may be the future of the new Universities founded by the Act of 1908, there is at present only one University with any pretensions to be judged by the standards of modern scholarship, and that that one is regarded as a rallying point for Protestantism and is, therefore, very largely shunned by the Catholics, who form three-quarters of the population.

Even in this hasty sketch of Ireland's condition some of the more obvious results of her connection with Great Britain cannot be omitted. One of these results is that Ireland, though a poor country, is obliged to maintain one of the most expensive governments in the world. She is administered by an amazing medley of overmanned, overlapping Boards, with their headquarters in Dublin Castle. It is a system that has most of the vices of a bureaucracy and very little even of its mechanical efficiency. A Russian bureaucracy in Finland could not be more utterly divorced from the sympathies and confidence of the people it rules. The stronghold of a small minority, of a single class, almost of a single creed, overrun with placemen, impenetrable to Irish ideas and Irish needs, uncontrolled by Parliament in London or by any representative body in Ireland, and presided over by a Viceroy who is forced to maintain that most demoralising

The Country and its Problems 71

and contemptible of all social institutions, a sham Court—I scarcely know what merit it possesses or what faults it lacks. With a slightly smaller population than Scotland, Ireland is saddled with nearly three times as many officials, a police force twice as large and costing £1,000,000 a year more for its upkeep, and a judiciary three times as expensive in proportion to population as the judiciary of England and Wales. An example is thus set of jobbery and extravagance that permeates the whole conduct of government in Ireland. Another result of the legislative union with Great Britain is that Ireland is grievously overtaxed. It is not that taxes are imposed upon her which are remitted in England, Scotland or Wales. The exact contrary is the case, certain taxes, mainly of an insignificant character, which are collected from the other parts of the United Kingdom, being remitted in favour of Ireland. Irish overtaxation is due to the fact that the capacity of the people to bear taxation is below that of the English, the Welsh or the Scotch, that their habits of life are different, and that identical imposts thus fall upon them, and especially upon the shoulders of their poor, with a disproportionate weight.

A third consequence of the government of Ireland from Westminster on a system anti-pathetic to the sentiments of the vast majority of the people is that many vital Irish problems are ignored—I have mentioned already the railways and education: to them should be

72 The Country and its Problems

added the yet bigger question of the wages and conditions of Irish Labour—and that many others are treated in a way and on a scale suitable, perhaps, to the needs of a comparatively rich and overwhelmingly industrial community, but wholly unsuited to a country with a low standard of living and mainly dependent on agriculture. The Old Age Pensions Act and the National Insurance Act are two recent and glaring instances in point; the Poor Law that was forced upon Ireland in 1837, as burdensome, wasteful and debilitating a system of indoor and outdoor relief as was ever conceived, is an earlier one. The whole economy of Irish life and the character of Ireland's fiscal interests and formation differ, indeed, so widely from those of England, that the attempt to apply identical legislation to the two countries, in nine cases out of ten, is foredoomed to failure. It results at one moment in Irish needs being judged by the English, and therefore the alien and ignorant standard of importance; at another in policies being adopted, such as Free trade and the equalisation of the spirit duties, with a single eye to British interests, and with little or no reference whatever to their oppressive effects on Irish welfare; and at a third it gives birth to measures so lavish in their financial benefits as to be wholly inappropriate to the special conditions of Ireland and potent agencies of social demoralisation. The doctrine of identical legislation means in practice that Ireland is either stunted, neglected, preyed upon,

The Country and its Problems 73

or over indulged. With very few exceptions—the Local Government Act, however, was one of them—the only successful measures passed by the British Parliament for Ireland since the Union have been either forced by Irish pressure and agitation, like the Acts emancipating the Catholics, abolishing tithes, disestablishing the Church, and importing some modicum of justice and humanity into the land tenure system, or have been measures, such as the Wyndham Land Act and the Act creating the Department of Agriculture, which involved no greater strain on statesmanship than that of embodying Irish thought and initiative in legislative form and in placing British credit at the service of Irish ideas. But apart from all this, no country can be at ease, can be morally or politically healthy, that is out of sympathy with its rulers, that feels its national genius thwarted, and that is eternally condemned to wrangling with another Power, and with a section of its own people, over the fundamentals of its system of government. British rule in Ireland is to be condemned, not because it is British, but because it is foreign, not so much for what it has done or has failed to do as for its inevitable and disintegrating influence on the character of the ruled. It has dissipated their sense of responsibility; it encourages them to rely on external agencies instead of on themselves; it fosters the pernicious belief that the cure for all ills is to be found in legislation; it alternates between a policy of doles and bribes

74 The Country and its Problems

and sugared paternalism and a policy of coercion ; it unsettles every function of the body politic and poisons public life at the source ; nothing can be normal, everything must be perverted and unnatural, in a land where political thought and energy are concentrated on a single issue that embraces the very framework of the State.

We have, then, in Ireland a poor and dwindling people, mainly Catholic, with a low standard of living that is emphasised and perpetuated by their absorption in stock-raising, their ignorance of agriculture, and the backwardness of their industrial development. They are a keen-witted people, but wretchedly educated. They are governed by a nation that is and must always be temperamentally incapable of understanding them—a nation that has made in Ireland its one grand administrative failure. The English are Protestant, stupid and successful ; the Irish are Catholic, imaginative, intelligent—and in their own land failures. Against this ill-assorted and unproductive union the Irish have never ceased to rebel. It is not that they suffer from actual oppression of the kind that the Germans inflict upon the Poles or the Russians upon the Finns. The exceptional laws, safeguards and precautions that are applied to Ireland and are not applied to England are few in number, and on the whole of little account. The Irish grievances against England are at least as much sentimental as material. Administrative extravagance and over-taxation, and the perpetual sacrifice of Irish

The Country and its Problems 75

interests to the exigencies of English parties, are evils that cut, indeed, less deeply into the popular consciousness than the lack of sympathy between rulers and ruled. The British spirit is repugnant to five-sixths of the Irish people, and the Irish spirit incomprehensible to almost all Englishmen ; and the gulf that separates them never seems so impassable as when England is most bent upon doing Ireland justice. Seven centuries of turbulent history have, unquestionably, weakened the moral fibre, impaired the virility, and encouraged every instinct of dissimulation among the Irishry ; but they have not robbed them of an abiding consciousness of nationality or of the conviction that they, and not their English rulers, are the rightful possessors of the soil of Ireland. The fight for the land and the fight for Home Rule still mark the goal of Irish endeavours.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW ELEMENTS

THAT a change should have come over England's thoughts about Ireland in the last twenty years is an important fact. But it is not nearly so important as the fact that a change should have come over Ireland's thoughts about herself, and that it should be possible, without using the language of rhetoric or of fancifulness, to speak of "the new Ireland" as a growing reality. Something that has almost the sweep of a revolution is undoubtedly at work in the Irish consciousness, character and outlook, affecting the direction of the people's interests, expanding their horizons, colouring their ideals, remaking, or at any rate profoundly influencing, their psychology. It is no easy matter to extract in a few sentences the essence of this variegated transformation. To some its most hopeful characteristic is the novel and pervasive interest in practicalities that has done more than a little to bring all Irishmen together, to blunt the edge of politics and sectarianism, and to give to business considerations a higher place in Irish regard than they have hitherto occupied.

Others will declare the master-fact of present-day Ireland to be the quickening of the spirit of independence and self-reliance ; and still others will translate it as the determination of the Irish people to build up an Irish character and an Irish individuality in an Irish atmosphere. The Irish renaissance is, in fact, compounded of all these elements, and they manifest themselves in many ways, political, economic and spiritual. In this chapter I shall attempt to bring under some sort of focus the significance of their manifold aims and activities.

Unquestionably, within the past two decades the Irish mind has shown a decided inclination towards the concrete and the constructive. There is a far wider realisation to-day than there ever was, or could be, before, that the upbuilding of the Irish nation depends less on the passing or the repeal of laws at Westminster, or on external assistance of any kind, than on the efforts of Irishmen in Ireland ; and that those efforts to produce their best results, must be non-political and non-sectarian. The best Irish thought is turning inwards. It is moving away from London and fastening upon Ireland herself. There has been a shifting of the centre of interest and energy, an increasing understanding that it is not in the House of Commons, but in Ireland, that the true current of national life flows, and that even in the absence of Home Rule, Irishmen may still accomplish something useful and tangible for their common country.

Thus we have seen the agricultural co-operative movement, initiated by Sir Horace Plunkett, spread until it now embraces 90,000 farmers and has organised over 900 co-operative creameries, poultry societies, village banks, and so on. We have seen the Recess Committee, composed of men of all ranks and religions and politics, formulating a programme of material amelioration. We have seen the fruit of that programme in the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, a Department popularly governed, working with and through committees appointed by the County Councils, and for the first time bringing expert assistance and advice within reach of the peasant proprietors. We have seen the establishment of the Congested Districts Board for the resettlement of the Western peasantry on an economic basis, and for the revival and encouragement of the Western fishing and cottage industries. We have seen the building of light railways. We have seen the famous round-table conference of landlords and tenants that brought the century-old struggle for the land within sight of a decisive and more or less harmonious finish. We have seen the strong beginnings of a movement of industrial recreation. Indeed, it is safe to say that the last twenty years have witnessed the growth of more interest among Irishmen in the practical problems of life, and more co-operation among them in the solution of those problems, than any previous period of Irish history. New spheres of non-

contentious endeavour have been opened up in which all Irishmen have freely participated.

As an example of what can be achieved when Irishmen get together, it is useful to recall how the Recess Committee met and how the Department of Agriculture came into being. The General Election of 1895 had resulted in a smashing defeat for the Liberals. The feelings that had been aroused by Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1893 died down when it was seen that, for purposes of practical politics, Home Rule was again indefinitely postponed. Sir Horace Plunkett seized upon the momentary calm to formulate and submit to his countrymen "a proposal affecting the general welfare of Ireland." The proposal was very simple; it was only the circumstance that it was put forward in Ireland and by an Irishman that made it so momentous. Sir Horace suggested that the time had come when Unionists, without abating one jot of their Unionism, and Nationalists, without abating one jot of their Nationalism, might meet and confer upon non-partisan schemes for the material and social betterment of their common country. Economic legislation, though sorely needed by Ireland, was hopelessly unattainable unless it could be removed from the region of controversy. All parties and all creeds were at one in desiring the welfare of Ireland. They might differ on the constitutional issue, but why should that prevent them from co-operating in projects of immediate and tangible utility, projects that could be

furthered without the smallest compromise of political faith ?

It gives the measure of Ireland's enslavement to the curse of contention that few were sanguine enough to believe that the Committee suggested by Sir Horace Plunkett could be got together. For a time the pessimists seemed on the way to be justified. Mr. Justin McCarthy, at that time the leader of the largest section of the Nationalist Party, declined to take part in any organisation that put material improvement above politics. Colonel Saunderson, the dashing leader of the Irish Unionists, refused point blank to sit on any Committee with Mr. John Redmond. Mr. Redmond himself, however, speaking for his little band of "Independents"—all that was left of the disciplined host that had once followed Parnell through thick and thin—announced his readiness to co-operate with Sir Horace Plunkett. Among the people generally the proposal met with a swift and hearty success. The Committee was formed ; meeting when Parliament was not sitting, it became known as the Recess Committee ; and among its members were to be found representatives, and in nearly all cases the best representatives, of every interest, class, industry, creed and party in Ireland. Orangemen and Jesuits, Unionists and Nationalists, the magnates of the industrial North, the leaders of the agricultural South and West, sat side by side in absolute harmony, and after months of exhaustive inquiry in Ireland and abroad presented a

unanimous Report. Such a spectacle was unique in Irish history. For the first time practicality triumphed over bigotry and partisanship. For the first time the politicians and the men of business met and fraternised on a common platform. For the first time an economic object secured the united support of the two forces that hitherto, to the immense disadvantage of the country, had been kept apart—the force of industrial leadership on the one hand and of political leadership on the other.

The aim of the Recess Committee was to ascertain the means by which the Government could best promote the development of Ireland's agricultural and industrial resources. The substance of its recommendations was that a new Government Department, to be called the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, should be created, should be adequately endowed, and should be charged with the duty of administering State aid to agriculture and industries in Ireland in such a way as to evoke and supplement, but not to supplant, self-help and individual initiative. These recommendations gathered round them a large and enthusiastic body of public opinion. They were pressed upon the Government by an Ireland that seemed for the moment to have forgotten its internal feuds and to have risen from the morass of politics into the clear air of practical endeavour. The Government found itself confronted by an irresistible case that for its own part, it was only too anxious

to meet. In 1899 the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction became a reality. It was provided at the outset with a capital sum of about £20,000 and an annual income of slightly over £160,000 for development purposes. Its powers include the aiding, improving and developing of agriculture in all its branches ; horticulture, forestry, home and cottage industries ; sea and inland fisheries; the aiding and facilitating of the transit of produce ; the provision of technical instruction suitable to the industrial needs of the country ; and the organisation of a system of education in science and art. Many scattered but co-related Boards and Departments were merged in the new Department and its constitution was expressly framed to enable the Government and the people to work together towards the building up of a more prosperous Ireland.

At some risk of dulness I must dwell a little longer on this feature of its administrative framework. The members of the Recess Committee and the founders of the Department were in complete agreement that its utility depended upon the spirit and degree of its co-operation with the people. To insure this co-operation, to make it possible for the Department to labour not only for the people but with them, a constitution was devised which renders it unique among British governing bodies. Attached to the Department is a Council of Agriculture of 102 members, two-thirds of whom are appointed by the County

Councils, the remainder being nominated by the Vice-President of the Department. The Council is chosen for three years; it must be convened at least once a year; and its functions are deliberative and advisory. The criticisms, suggestions and recommendations of the Council have proved to be of the greatest value to the officials of the Department. But the Council fulfils another purpose also. Once every three years it resolves itself into an Electoral College, choosing members to represent it on the Agricultural Board and on the Board of Technical Instruction. The Agricultural Board, consisting of twelve members, eight of whom are elected by the Council, passes upon the expenditure of all moneys from the endowment funds of the Department. Having therefore the ultimate power of the purse, it is able to check, modify and if necessary veto any policy of which it does not approve. The Board of Technical Instruction, with a rather more complex constitution, has precisely the same powers in relation to its special province. It is clear that machinery, so unusual and elaborate as this, can only be worked at all if it is pervaded by the right spirit. It is clear also that, given the right spirit, it presents a singularly acute and inspiring union of administrative efficiency and popular control. But the Department is a democratic body, not only in its organisation, but in its *modus operandi*. The Act creating it empowered the local County, Borough and District Councils to appoint committees, partly

elective and partly co-optive, for the purpose of carrying out such of the Department's schemes as are of local and not of general importance ; and to participate in these schemes the local authorities must themselves contribute to the cost of financing them. In this way the Department is brought and kept in touch with the needs of each district without losing its centralised efficiency and the principle of local effort and local co-operation is effectively preserved.

Nearly all the administrative Boards in Ireland are not Irish but English, alien institutions framed after the Whitehall model, and, whether useful or not, symbols to the Irish mind of a foreign and uncongenial rule. But the Department of Agriculture represents not only a concession won by argument and persuasion instead of agitation, but an effort of purely native thought applied to national economics. The people know it to be their very own ; their attitude towards it is wholly different from their attitude towards any other administrative establishment in the country ; it enters their daily lives and businesses as a friend and not as a stranger ; and I think it a most hopeful and significant fact that this, almost the first, application of Irish ideas to the problems of Irish government should have resulted in the creation of a Department that is not only a variation from the normal type, but in range, efficiency and responsiveness to the real needs of the country far surpasses any similar Department in the British Isles.

Here, then, we have a working-model, in the sphere of constructive economics, of the ideas that are shaping what is nothing less than a new Ireland. And this same spirit of co-operation that made possible the summoning of the Recess Committee and the creation of the Department of Agriculture bore a few years later yet more startling fruit when landlords and tenants met to end the devastating struggle for the land by mutual consent. The slow but indubitable emergence of Ireland from the more acute stage of agrarian unrest; the consequent appeasement of the old class bitterness; the multiplying tokens of an increasing prosperity; the general attrition of interest in political agitation; the thousands of meetings held all over the country in connection with the agricultural co-operative movement; the commingling of men of all creeds and classes and parties in the working of the Local Government Act—all these factors have told powerfully in propagating a consciousness of unity and independence. Nor have they been without political results. The very general disenchantment with the personnel and policy of the Nationalist Party which of late years has been visible among the masses of the people has not been due to any real waning of Nationalist sentiment; nor has it been due merely to the absence of a strong and commanding leader or to the fact that having satisfied his historic passion for ownership, the peasant believes that he has received from agitation all that it is capable

of yielding. It is due above everything else to the folly and myopia that have insensibly separated the Party from the most vigorous thought in the country. The true complaint against the Nationalist Party is not that they have been anti-British, but that they have never been sufficiently pro-Irish and have never risen above the purely political conception of what nationality is. The new Ireland has come into existence in spite of them, without their collective assistance and often in the face of their collective hostility. Not one of the vital movements of regeneration that have arisen since the dying down of the exhaustive passions aroused by the Parnellite split owes anything to the Party as a Party. The agricultural co-operative movement, the industrial movement, the Gaelic League—all these are the product of a spirit and an atmosphere which the official exponents of Irish Nationalism have failed or have not tried to comprehend. Politics, no doubt, are to the one idea'd men, or at least to the men with one idea at a time; and the Nationalist M.P.s might perhaps justify their narrowness of outlook by pleading the tactical necessity of concentrating their whole strength at a single point. The plea would not avail them much, if I correctly interpret the temper of all that is most genuine and aggressive in Irish Nationalism to-day. The new Ireland is beginning to think and to inquire; the Party insists on manufacturing its public opinion and does what

it can by gasconading resolutions and systematic thimble-rigging to stifle private thought. The Irish Party, again, has always confounded nationality with politics, and has always dubbed as anti-national those who did not subscribe to its own political formulæ. The new Ireland relegates politics to a secondary place, works for a union of all classes, creeds and parties, and welcomes everything, from whatever source, that contributes to Irish well-being. The Irish Party has consistently acted on the principle that the salvation of Ireland is to be wrought by speeches and manœuvres in the House of Commons; it has neglected the intellectual, moral and in large part the economic progress of the country in order to devote its exclusive power to the constitutional panacea; it has denied that Ireland could be prosperous without Home Rule, and it has opposed and condemned nearly every effort to make her prosperous as an act of treason to the national cause. The new Ireland, on the other hand, relies for the upbuilding of the country and its people upon the practical work of Irishmen in Ireland, scouts the notion that the Irish question is a question of politics merely, and insists that the task of betterment shall no longer be postponed until an Irish Parliament is able to take it in hand. There has thus been propagated a subtle opposition of aims and ideals between the people and their Parliamentary representatives, a cleavage that has inevitably acted as a damper on political agitation. Except

in the western counties, where it is still the popular instrument of a propaganda against the graziers, the United Irish League, indeed, has more than once of recent years been on the verge of collapse.

If now we turn for a moment to the Unionists, we find that among them, too, disintegration spreads apace. Ireland used to be three-quarters black and one quarter white, three-quarters Nationalist and one-quarter Unionist. But the old lines of demarcation are losing their rigidity, are beginning to waver, at certain points are even meeting and crossing. Within the last few years there has come to the surface a neutral, greyish tinge of political opinion that, while anxious to preserve the Parliamentary union between the two countries, favours a wide and liberal extension of Irish control over purely Irish affairs. This it must be borne, is not a recession on the part of the Nationalists—Unionism, like Protestantism, makes no converts in Ireland; it is an advance on the part of the Unionists, not of all Unionists, but of some of their more enlightened and constructive members. The significance of this movement is far greater than its numerical strength. Politics and parties in Ireland carry with them social, religious and historical implications and significances of much greater intensity and of far wider import than we ever dream of attaching to them in England; and an Irish Unionist who ceases to be a Unionist makes a break that involves considerably more

than a mere change of party and political affiliation. He cuts loose from the history and traditions of a caste as well as from a party, from a social environment as well as from a political association, from a state of mind as well as from a creed. Yet more than a few Unionists have made the rupture. Conscious of the expensive inadequacies of the Irish form of government, realising and proclaiming its lack of responsiveness to the needs and sentiments of the people, and diagnosing the Irish situation as offering a choice between immediate upbuilding and rapid decline, they have sought not unsuccessfully to wean Unionism from a policy of mere resistance to a policy of positive amelioration, to construct a body of moderate opinion, and to organise Irish sentiment against the continuance of many tangible and recognised abuses. So far their movement has produced rather economic than political fruit. The Land Conference of 1902 owed much to their conciliating and practical efforts; the Irish Councils Bill of 1907, on the other hand, which was largely the expression of their political views, came to disastrous shipwreck. The important thing, however, is less the fate of their particular proposals, or their numerical strength in the country, than the fact that a growing body of Unionists should perceive and acknowledge the need of administrative changes, should admit that the present system of British rule in Ireland is neither perfect nor immutable, should emphasise the existence of a

genuine and distinctive Irish nationality, and should be endeavouring to bring all classes and parties together for purposes of material reform. The political destiny of those who had advanced thus far towards an understanding and appreciation of the Nationalist case was never for a moment in doubt. They have become to a man Home Rulers.

But the awakening of certain Unionists to the fact that co-operation with their Nationalist fellow-countrymen is not only possible, but eminently desirable; and their refusal to remain for ever the members of an aloof, isolated and *fainéant* coterie, are not the only tokens that the spirit and power of ascendancy are weakening. Even in Belfast a change has made itself felt. The capital of the "Black North" is something more than a hotbed of rabid Protestantism and caste arrogance. It is also a great industrial city with strong democratic affiliations, and of recent years it has foreshadowed the part it will play in the Irish Parliament of the future by throwing up an active and powerful Labour Party. Not less significant was the starting some few years ago of the Independent Orange League, addressing itself to "all Irishmen whose country stands first in their affections," seeking to unite them all on a common plane of nationality, denouncing Toryism, clericalism and Dublin Castle with equal fervour, and endeavouring to bring Irish Protestantism once more into the main stream of Irish life. The great blunder

of the Irish Protestant in the past has lain in supposing that England and not Ireland was his native country ; that to be loyal to the Throne he had to be disloyal to Ireland ; that Irish individuality, Irish ideals and Irish genius could only be fostered and developed by Anglicisation ; and that to make Ireland contented and prosperous she must lose her distinctive nationality and mature along English lines. There have been many signs in the past decade that the stupendous folly and fallacy of such a policy and such an attitude are becoming recognised. Young Ulster is sheering off a point or two from the rock-ribbed faith of its fathers. It is no longer so satisfied as it was to be the witless plaything of landlords and lawyers, to nourish a barren sectarianism, or to look across the Channel for the centre of national interests. It is beginning to break loose from "boss" rule and to drop the "garrison" theory of its existence ; it is perceiving that Catholics and Protestants, north and south, have a common concern, and substantially a common grievance, in the land question, that the drain of emigration hits them all alike, that every section of the country and every class stands to gain by an increase in Irish well-being, and that the next great movement in the tortuous history of the Irish agrarian problem, the movement for the compulsory expropriation of landlordism, is likely to find in Ulster its most pertinacious backing.

Then, again, as I shall try to make clear in a subsequent chapter, so far as Unionism was an

effort to maintain a hold on the land and to keep rents up, it has been mortally weakened by the operation of the Wyndham Act. The effects of that measure in inducing a general pacification of the peasantry are already visible ; its effects in modifying the social and political attitude of the landlords, while so far they are less apparent, will in the long run prove not less potent. It means just as much for the future of Ireland that the Unionists and the gentry should cease to be landlords as it does that the Nationalist peasants should become proprietors. The last emblem and stronghold of the British "garrison," the land has always been not one whit less the centre and rallying point of Unionist defence than of Nationalist attack. But the Unionist landlords are now ceasing to be landlords. They are relinquishing their last position of authority. They are abandoning a sphere in which have been gathered all the worst animosities of Irish history. No longer landlords warring rancorously with tenants, but resident country gentlemen living at peace with neighbours, a change of spirit will pass over them, new opportunities of usefulness and activity will be open to them, they will be able, to a degree hitherto impossible, to identify themselves with the lives and interest and aspirations of the people around them.

What, then, is the situation ? We have seen that a number of varied influences are at work sapping the strength of the two chief political parties, that neither the Nationalists nor the

Unionists are able to look forward to the future with entire equanimity, and that Irish politics, up to the time of the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill, were in a state of uncertainty and flux. We have seen, too, that a new sense of interdependence is being propagated among Irishmen who hitherto have barely conceived the possibility of having anything in common. We have seen, moreover, that industrial and material problems have acquired a new interest for the Irish people, and are beginning to supplant their old indulgence in barren agitation. The broad direction of events during the past two decades has pointed to the decay and final extermination of the old type of negative, obstructive Unionism, and to the gradual approximation of all Irishmen to a common centre. The barriers which for seven centuries have separated class from class and creed from creed are being slowly torn down, and the time is coming when Irishmen of all ranks may meet and know one another and fraternise in the task of building up a really national life on a new basis. For the moment this healing movement of reconciliation is impeded by a resurgence of the passions inseparable from the discussion of Home Rule. It will survive them. Ireland, in my belief, has started on a path which will carry her once and for all beyond the ancient and vitiating antagonisms of social, political and sectarian exclusiveness.

The natural inference from what has here been written might well seem to be that Ireland,

wearying of the tumult of politics and intent above everything else upon the ways and means of prosperity, was about to become almost as contented a part of the United Kingdom as Scotland or Wales, that the desire for self-government was weakening, and that "the Irish Question" was on the way to solving itself. But such an inference, I believe, would be profoundly mistaken. The very movements, indeed, that in one light might appear to warrant it are in another its chief refutation. For if we analyse merely the factors I have already named—and as we shall presently see, they do not stand alone—we shall find that there is a considerable sense in which they may all be said to proceed upon a common formula and to work towards a single objective. The formula is, roughly, that the salvation of Ireland depends primarily upon the efforts of the Irish people themselves working on Irish soil. The objective is the strengthening of the moral stamina of the people and their education in the broadest spirit of nationality.

The importance of this formula and of this objective can only be measured by remembering that Irish history has fatally discouraged the spirit of self-reliance, has split the people into a series of separate and contending factions, and has implanted in some three-fourths of them the disastrous belief that the cure for all their ills is to be sought in legislation, in assistance from without, in some external agency, and not

in themselves. If, therefore, it be true that the Irish, thanks to the operation of these new influences, are coming to recognise that they are all members of one nation, are learning to lean on themselves, are ceasing to look exclusively to Westminster, are emancipating themselves from the tyranny of Leagues and organisations, are cultivating a virile and salutary individualism, are beginning, in short, to think, speak and act for themselves—if all this be true, or even approximately true, then the fact is one that carries with it some considerable implications. And in a country where politics hold a dominion not exceeded in Greece or America some of those implications are bound to be political.

The political party that most clearly fosters and responds to the new spirit that is stirring Irish life is the Sinn Fein party. There is no need to discuss its policy of withdrawing the Irish representatives from Westminster, of boycotting the agencies of British rule, and of erecting out of hand an Irish government in Dublin. The important thing about the Sinn Feiners is the spirit that animates them and the arguments they rely upon in advocating their programme. Parliamentarianism, they say, acts upon the national energies like a soporific. The people quickly come to think that they have done all that can be expected of them when they elect a certain number of real or professed Home Rulers to act for them at Westminster. No tangible sacrifice of any kind is asked of them ;

they shout and pass unbridled resolutions, and are fed on rhetoric ; there are very few contested elections, and, therefore, nothing in the nature of a political education ; the “ machine,” directed usually by the local trader and money-lender and publican—who are often not three persons, but one—runs things to suit itself ; the political contribution of “ the people ” towards the cause of Home Rule takes for the most part the form of sitting listlessly at home and awaiting results they do next to nothing towards producing. It is precisely this habit of delegating functions that the Sinn Féiners wish to drive out of Irish politics. Their aim is to substitute for it a system of universal and individual service. Parliamentarianism, in their view, destroys all sense of personal responsibility and initiative. It deals with a vague collective entity which it calls “ the electorate ” or “ the people,” whereas the appeal of the Sinn Féiners is directly and solely to the single citizen. It is by acting on the individual that they hope to put a stop to enlistments in the British Army or the Royal Irish Constabulary, and to shame Irishmen out of sitting on any British Commission or accepting any post that involves taking an oath of loyalty to the British Crown. It is by inducing the individual to drink less and smoke less that they reckon on still further reducing England’s revenue from Ireland below her expenditure on it. It is by impressing upon the individual as well as upon public bodies the

patriotic duty of buying only Irish goods and products that they play their parts in promoting Irish industries and agriculture. It is by always preaching at the individual that he is an Irishman that they seek to encourage him in learning Gaelic. Their aim is a bilingual, self-contained, self-sufficing, wholly Irish Ireland, created and supported by the sacrifices, the individual exertions, and the ordered unity of the people themselves.

Moreover, so long as Ireland is represented at Westminster, London and not Dublin is the Irish capital; the people grow absorbed in the spectacle of small Parliamentary manœuvres; and while perpetually speculating on what England is going to do for Ireland they forget that there is a good deal which Ireland might and should do for herself. This is a habit of mind which destroys a just sense of values, saps self-reliance, and debilitates the national character; and the Sinn Feiners make it the prime object of their attack. Parliamentarianism in their eyes is mere play-acting, and fosters some of the worst weaknesses in the Irish temperament by distracting the popular mind from the duties immediately in front of it. The policy, on the other hand, which they propose treats every Irishman not as an electoral pawn, but as a living force, and asks for its fulfilment the constant practice of a first-hand patriotism. They are all on the side of material development from within, of everything indeed that promises to make

Ireland more prosperous and self-reliant; and they take the secular view of things educational as instinctively as they take the national view of things political and the Protectionist view of things fiscal. Having next to no funds or organisation or leaders, their direct and tangible influence has been small. But the spirit of virility and self-help, and the conception of an all-embracing nationality, which they have persistently inculcated, have undoubtedly done something to quicken and invigorate both thought and action.

Of far deeper import, however, than the Sinn Fein movement in the formation of the new Ireland is the Gaelic League. Started less than twenty years ago to preserve Irish as the national language of Ireland and to extend its use as a spoken tongue, it has met with a phenomenal success. The Gaelic League to-day boasts of an enrolled membership of one hundred thousand, with more than nine hundred branches throughout the country. It maintains fourteen regular organizers and eighty travelling teachers. It has founded six training colleges for the education of instructors in Gaelic. It claims to have forced the teaching of Irish into three thousand schools. It has compelled its adoption as a compulsory subject for matriculation in the new University. It has secured from the Board of National Education an acknowledgment of the right of every Irish child in every national school to be taught Irish as an ordinary subject. In

districts that are wholly or partly Irish-speaking, it has succeeded in introducing an official bilingual programme of instruction. It has made a knowledge of Gaelic essential to candidates for a large number of public offices. At this moment, there are probably not less than a quarter of a million of Irish people, children and adults, learning Irish. The Gaelic League is one of the largest and most successful publishing firms in the country. It organizes festivals and summer schools; it prints a weekly and a monthly journal; it holds public contests and distributes prizes. One meets its influence everywhere. You can hardly go into an Irish town without finding one or two names written in Gaelic over the doors of the shops. You can hardly pick up an Irish paper without finding a column at least printed in Gaelic. In Dublin the names of the streets appear both in English and in Irish. Bank managers who refuse to cash cheques signed in Gaelic, railway managers who see no reason why they should go to the expense of having the names of their stations placarded in Gaelic, find themselves enthusiastically denounced from one end of the country to the other.

Nor is it only with the language that the Gaelic League concerns itself. Music, oratory, singing, dancing and the revival of the old Gaelic games all come within its scope. It is the only really national university that Ireland possesses, and its splendid success means that education in Ireland is to become permeated with Irish ideas

and brought into touch with the historic genius of the people, and that Ireland is to be made once more an interesting country for Irishmen to live in. But even that is far from telling the whole story. You cannot revive a dying tongue without first touching the secret chord of national patriotism. Gaelic is not an easy language, and the average indolent Irishman will not rouse himself to grapple with its difficulties unless it is presented to him in the light of a high duty, unless he is passionately convinced that, so long as he is ignorant of Irish, he does not deserve to be called an Irishman. But when that point of exaltation is reached, many consequences follow that seem, at first sight, to have little or nothing to do with a mere literary renaissance. I recall, among a hundred similar instances, the case of a grocer's assistant in a small town in County Fermanagh whom the impulse of the Gaelic League had gripped and conquered. All day he wrapped up parcels of tea and sugar; at night he studied Gaelic; and when he had mastered it he began to teach it. That man was unconsciously building up a twofold character. The pleasures he denied himself, the ridicule he disregarded and lived down, the mental alertness which he cultivated, were in themselves a stringent course in self-discipline. He had found an ideal, a purpose, a supreme objective, to live and work for; and in pursuing them he could not but develop courage, veracity and the habit of clear thinking.

But besides this he was becoming Irish ; he was rearing a new and searching sense of nationality ; he was stepping into possession of a historical birthright, the mere conception of which had never dawned on him before. Such a man, realising himself and his country for the first time, would not, indeed could not, confine his awakened patriotism to the mere mastery of Gaelic. He would inevitably be led on to wishing Ireland to be Irish all through, Irish not only in her language, but in her atmosphere, in her industries, her government, her pastimes, her mode of life. That has been the experience of all countries that have suddenly revived and reconquered the use of their ancestral tongue. Such countries are filled with an irresistible ambition to be self-contained and self-efficient, to have the sole ordering of their own affairs, to wear clothes of their own manufacture, to consume products of their own growing. It is so in Ireland. Dr. Douglas Hyde has himself described the Gaelic League as "an educational body tinged with an industrial strain." Its first object is literary ; its second is social and economic. It is a strong and ardent supporter of temperance. It has thrown itself heart and soul into popularising the sale of Irish goods and products. It has done more than any other agency to brighten village life, to raise the standard of rural economy, and to implant among the Irish peasantry a higher conception of the comforts and embellishments of the home.

And that is the answer to the "practical" critic who scoffs at the Irish renaissance as so much sentimental nonsense. I am persuaded that, wherever the Gaelic League goes, a spirit of intellectual curiosity, of self-respect, of self-sacrifice, and of nationality based on knowledge, follows after. Life becomes more purposeful and less gloomy for those whom its propaganda has touched, their character is strengthened, their interests immensely widened. To lead the Irish people back to the baptismal font of their true nationality, to stimulate among them a study of their native tongue and the cultivation of all those elements that make them a distinctive entity, is not to render them unpractical or to unfit them in any way for material success in life. It is, on the contrary, to fill them with a new initiative, alertness, backbone and independence. All other Leagues in Irish history have destroyed character or demoralised it. The Gaelic League makes it.

Students of history, especially of such histories as those of Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, when they find a people deliberately setting out to recover for themselves their ancient speech, and when they find a group of able and earnest writers devoting all their powers of expression in poetry, the drama and the press to the illustration of national themes and the delineation of national traits, will infer that the country in which this mental and moral uprising takes place is on the eve of a profound and penetrating revivification.

The inference, in my judgment, is a sound one even in the case of Ireland, where most analogies hopelessly break down. That is to say, I believe that Ireland is in the throes of some such renaissance of her national spirit and character as Hungary underwent sixty odd years ago. She is being reborn. The people are recovering their collective soul; they are reviving their racial consciousness; they are being swept and invigorated by the returning spirit of essential nationhood. Ireland, as I see her, is developing a new backbone and a new sense of unity. Almost for the first time in her history, she is working round to some realisation of what nationality is. She is beginning to see that it is something beyond politics and immeasurably above the factitious partitions of social and sectarian strife. Ireland, in a word, is thrilling with the determination to become and to remain Irish. It is for that purpose she is seeking to revive Gaelic, to popularise anew her ancient songs and pastimes, to restore the links in her historical continuity that were severed when the decay of her ancient tongue passed a sponge over all her national characteristics and reduced her, socially, intellectually and spiritually, to a mere English province. It is for that purpose and in the faith of that ideal she is working to make herself materially self-sufficient, to enforce the purchase of Irish goods and products as a patriotic duty, and to develop all her resources from within.

All these movements, consciously or otherwise,

work towards one all-embracing end—an Irish Ireland. Whether their immediate aim is that of strengthening the national will or awakening the national soul or of stiffening the national backbone, all proceed upon the formula that the salvation of Ireland must be sought and achieved by Irishmen on Irish soil. All in their different ways set forth an ideal of nationality that overrides parties, creeds and sections. All inculcate self-reliance as the primal need. All discourage that fatal Irish habit, of all the fruits of misgovernment the most poisonous and paralyzing, of throwing upon anybody but themselves the responsibility for their moral or material shortcomings. To encourage and find or force an outlet for the native instincts and genius of the people, to save them from Anglicisation, and to lead them back to the well-head of the old Irish language, arts and recreations, are the objects of the Gaelic League. To make the Irish politically virile, united, and constructive is the essence of Sinn Féinism. To promote Irish industries and equip the peasant for the realities of a competitive agricultural existence are the more prosaic aims of the industrial revival and of the co-operative movement. At first sight, they might not seem to have much in common; in reality, they have everything. They all make for initiative and self-dependence, and intensify the sense of an upbuilding nationality.

CHAPTER V.

THE FARMER AND THE FUTURE.

THE prodigious and many-sided revolution involved in the breaking up of the old land tenure system and in the creation of a peasant proprietary is proceeding slowly, almost uneventfully, to its predestined end. Already considerably over half the agricultural holdings in Ireland have been sold, or are in process of being sold, to the tenants; and three occupiers out of every five now pay annuities or interest instead of rent. The first rush to sell has, indeed, abated owing to the financial defects of the Wyndham Act and the changes in the terms of transfer imposed by the amending Act of 1909; but it is by no means certain that this may not prove a blessing in disguise by taking the initial edge off the blind land-hunger of the peasantry and scaling prices down to a more rational basis. In another twenty or twenty-five years Irish landlordism, as we have known it for three or four centuries, will have ceased to exist, and Great Britain will have advanced towards its extinction loans to the amount of some £200,000,000.

The policy of Land Purchase has been tested in many ways and has been amply vindicated.

106 The Farmer and the Future

The social and political appeasement induced by it is at least as great as its most ardent advocates could have expected; its moral and material results in instilling into the farmer self-respect and independence and in furnishing him with a new and comprehensible incentive to improve his technical methods, have also been not less widespread and substantial; and only about a third of one per cent. of the purchasers are in arrears with their annuity payments. But there is one way in which the Wyndham Act as yet has hardly been tested at all. It had the supreme good fortune to be launched on a rising market; it has not yet had to face a period of agricultural distress. The tendency of prices is likely for some years to come to be upward, but sooner or later the market will break as it broke in the 'seventies, and the capacity of the new order of peasant proprietors to weather the lean years of depression will be thoroughly explored. It is pertinent, therefore, to bear in mind that, even though the purchase annuities show on the average a reduction of about twenty per cent. on second-term rents, the tenants are generally held to have got so far the worst of the bargain; that a government is of necessity an unfeeling landlord, can make no allowance for crop failure or cattle disease or the pressure of Continental or Transatlantic competition, and must conduct its transactions on a cash, and not a credit, basis; and that many of the former tenants who have been seduced by an immediate cancellation of

The Farmer and the Future 107

arrears, or by the scarcely less attractive expedient of merging them in the purchase-money, are likely to find, when a bad year comes, that the annuities they have agreed to pay are wholly beyond their means.

So long as it is humanly possible to pay, the Irish peasant will fulfil all his obligations to the uttermost farthing; and the last possibility of a strike against the remittance of the annuities will have vanished when the Irish government and the Irish taxpayer are compelled to stand bail, as it were, for the Irish peasant, and when the instalment-money is made the recognised basis of Irish national finance. It is not in that direction that the peril lies. It lies rather in the fact that many peasants have become proprietors who have neither the knowledge, inclination, nor capital to become farmers, and who, after dabbling unsuccessfully with stock-raising—at once the bane and mainstay of Irish agriculture—will have to let their lands for grazing to their wealthier neighbours, and be forced out of an independent proprietorial existence. It lies in the grim possibility that the local trader, who is also the local publican and the local moneylender, may be the landlord of the future. “And if that happens,” I remember being told by an experienced land agent, who firmly believed it would happen, “God help Ireland! Talk of the cruelty of the English to the Irish—it is nothing compared with the cruelty of the Irish to one another. The trader

108 The Farmer and the Future

turned landlord will be ten times more avaricious and mean and tyrannical than the old type of English absentee. He will wring the very vitals out of any man he has in his power." The same point has been driven home by Mr. George W. Russell in his "Co-Operation and Nationality." There is no fear, he declares, of socialism in Ireland. "There are other and real dangers. There is the danger that without a complete re-organisation of business methods in rural Ireland it will slip back gradually into the old order with a new class of landlords. There is the fear that Michael Mulligan, gombeen man, and his class will begin gradually to absorb the farms of their tied customers and create a new aristocracy. Indeed, they are doing this already. The old aristocracies swaggered royalty to the devil. They borrowed money at sixty per cent. and ruined themselves. The new aristocracy, whose coming I dread, have been accustomed to lend money at sixty per cent. and to ruin others. I prefer the former type, though I hope no one will accuse me of unduly exalting it."

Speaking broadly, one may say that the policy of land purchase on a permissive basis has been least successful in the most prosperous and in the poorest districts of the country—in the former because the inducement to sell is less operative, in the latter because the landlords are still in a position to maintain their old ascendancy. Both Ulster and Connaught, when the time comes for the inevitable application of compulsion, will

The Farmer and the Future 109

be at one in welcoming it. To compulsion we must eventually work round, but I doubt whether all the stages of our progress will be tranquil. The anomaly, so vigorously and with so sure a touch brought out by M. Paul Dubois in his "*L'Irlande Contemporaine*," of the general depopulation of the West of Ireland combined here and there with a sporadic over population, of rural slums lying on the edge of vast, empty grazing ranches, of cattle triumphant and ranging far and wide while men fester and decay in a squalid serfdom, will not, and should not, be allowed to continue indefinitely. For twenty years and more the Congested Districts Board has been tinkering at it, buying up estates and parcelling them out among the people, building cottages, encouraging migration, and doling out grants and loans with a lavish hand. It is not easy work. The people do not want to go; they cling to their hovels with an intensity that takes no account of material improvement. The priests, again, do not like to lose their parishioners; the people in the district that is to receive them resent their coming—especially the younger and landless sons of the farmers who naturally feel they ought to have the first call on the unoccupied land in their neighbourhood; there are violent jealousies and recriminations as to the proposed division of the land; at times a cantankerous woman will block a scheme for years simply because she thinks herself entitled to a larger share than has been allotted

110 The Farmer and the Future

to her. But with infinite tact and patience—there are no kindlier or harder-working or more devoted officials anywhere than those of the Congested Districts Board in Ireland—all objections are finally borne down ; the land is “striped” ; the tenants are established in their new quarters ; and soon the whole face of the countryside begins to change. Cottages displace hovels ; the animals are driven from the house and kept in out-buildings ; the holdings are compact, accessible, and yield a livelihood ; and the new tenants, it is claimed, are inspired to keener work, to a higher standard of living, and to the adoption of improved methods by the thought that they or their children will eventually become freehold occupiers. It is a moral as well as an economic revolution that is being wrought, and on the face of it nothing could be more admirable.

I say “on the face of it,” because the principle on which the Congested Districts Board is conducting its experiments seems of very doubtful soundness and the prosperity it has created to be largely illusory. Necessarily, perhaps, but none the less regrettably, the Board has subscribed to, and has in consequence done a great deal to popularise, two fundamental fallacies. The first is that the redistribution of the land is the key to the whole problem of agricultural destitution in the West ; the second is that the State is able to do far more for the people than they can do for themselves. But the mere settlement of the

The Farmer and the Future 111

uneconomic man on an economic holding will not make a farmer of him, and an elaborate system of spoon-feeding him will not stimulate his independence. The Board has set up a number of small grass farms in place of one or two large ones; but it has not taken sufficient care that its beneficiaries should be men trained to make competent use of the land bestowed upon them; nor has it counteracted the deficiencies of the single unit by merging them in the co-operative group; nor has it varied the type of holding to individual needs. Its policy, if pursued, will result in the grazing lands of the West being split up into more or less uniform twenty-acre holdings, occupied by isolated, inefficient, unorganised congests, totally unversed in the intricacies of mixed farming, superficially well off so long as they are financed by the Board, but unprepared to face the responsibilities of independent ownership, and inevitably driven to subdivision under circumstances that may in the future reproduce the conditions of the past over again. It is too early yet to say that the Board has succeeded in building up a single self-supporting community; it selects the objects of its benevolence without reference to their fitness to profit by all that is done on their behalf; it adjusts the antagonistic claims of the migrants on the one hand and of the landless men of the locality into which they are moved on the other, by the light of no fixed principle; it has effected a great deal of difficult and delicate work in the

112 The Farmer and the Future

way of transplanting families and redistributing land, but it cannot be said to have strengthened the agricultural economy of the people, and it has so far done little to foster, even if in some respects it has not actually retarded, that spirit of self-help and of co-operation on which alone a stable peasant proprietary can be established.

The rural problem in the West remains, in short, almost as unsolved as when the Congested Districts Board first began to scratch the surface of it; and so far as one can see, it is destined to increase in complexity and acuteness. Neither the Wyndham Act nor the Act of 1909 has really touched its essentials; and as a whole it is never likely to be grappled with so long as Great Britain appoints the Board to whose care it has been committed, and finances its operations, and so long as Irish thought and responsibility are brought to bear on it only at second hand. The question of the resettlement of the Western peasantry and of the breaking up of the grass lands, and all the problems of principle and method connected with these operations, are precisely the class of questions most affected by the denial of self-government. Having no effective jurisdiction over their settlement, Ireland has never troubled to plumb them to the bottom. Her chief contribution to their solution has been that of playing upon English benevolence and gullibility in order to secure for her own people the immediate maximum of eleemosynary benefits; and one may be sure that the uneconomic

The Farmer and the Future 113

holding, the position of the agricultural labourers, and the whole problem of encouraging a more diversified form of cultivation, will make heavy drafts on the time and intelligence of the Irish Parliament.

The policy of land purchase, I must again repeat, even in the districts where it has operated most efficaciously, has not brought, and by itself can never bring, the Irish millennium. What it has done is to create a peasant proprietary whose stability and well-being depends absolutely on their capacity to make agriculture pay. To foster and guide the practical efficiency of the Irish peasant is, therefore, from the English no less than from the Irish standpoint, the first and most imperative duty of constructive statesmanship. The Wyndham Act, if it has not ended, has profoundly altered the character and conditions of the Irish agrarian problem. For the first time, and with only minor and local distractions, Ireland is squarely confronted with the realities of a competitive agricultural existence. For the first time the question for her is not who is to own the soil, and how little he is to pay for it, but how much can he get out of it. The struggle over the rent and ownership of the land has ceased, or is ceasing. The infinitely more momentous struggle for a living on the land has just begun. Hitherto the Irish agrarian problem has been mainly social and political, a problem not of agriculture but of tenure. Henceforward it will be mainly technical and

114 The Farmer and the Future

economic. To equip the new proprietors with the skill and confidence and capital and business aptitudes for meeting their responsibilities, to instruct them in the rudiments of mixed and intensive farming, and to save them from being squeezed to the wall by the money-lender—these are the kind of problems that will have to be solved if the peace induced by the Wyndham Act is to bear fruit in a more prosperous and contented Ireland.

One thing, and one alone, can save the peasant proprietary—co-operation. I do not mean that co-operation by itself will be sufficient to maintain them in economic freedom and prosperity, but that without co-operation other agencies, such as technical instruction, must inevitably fail. As a community of small stock raisers they are doomed. As a community of small isolated farmers, vainly struggling against Transatlantic competition and the pliant and adhesive trusts into which the peasants of the Continent have enrolled themselves, their fate is not less certain. Ireland ought to be and might be a second and more prosperous Denmark. She can only become so if the new proprietors are taught to organise every detail of their business; if they band themselves together for the purchase of raw materials and mechanical requirements; if they combine for the improvement of all classes of live stock and for the manufacture of butter, bacon, and many other products; if they co-operate for the purposes of mutual insurance and

The Farmer and the Future 115

the creation of credit ; and if they form themselves into societies that will enable them to control the whole complicated process of modern marketing. Unless these things are done, and done quickly, I doubt whether there is an agricultural expert anywhere who would not pronounce the policy of land purchase a blind gamble against overwhelming odds.

The whole business of farming has been revolutionised in the last forty years. Competition is no longer local but world-wide. To eat in one hemisphere what has been grown in another is an occurrence so familiar as to have lost all significance. Vast tracts of virgin soil have been opened up in the uttermost parts of the earth, and their products, thanks to incredible improvements in preservation and carriage, are brought to our swollen and hungry towns, at regular intervals, in fresh condition, and of fairly uniform quality. On the Continent the farmers have adjusted themselves to the new conditions by a free and intelligent use of co-operation. Co-operation has enabled them to produce more abundantly and more cheaply ; to improve the quality of their crops and live stock ; to provide themselves with a constant flow of capital ; to collect in bulk ; to regularise and standardise their consignments, and to forward them at a minimum cost of transit and distribution. What chance has the Irish peasant, what chance, for the matter of that, has the English smallholder, against these formidable organisations ?

116 The Farmer and the Future

About as much, in the long run, as a small American refiner against the Standard Oil Company. So long as he remains an isolated unit, paying the highest prices for his seeds, manures, machinery; without capital, and with no one but the gombeen man to turn to for credit; at the mercy of the railways and the middleman; wasteful, unscientific, and unsystematic—the Irish peasant is little better placed for competing in the English market than if he lived in Manchuria.

A beginning—a splendid and inspiring beginning, but still a beginning only—has been made to modernise Irish agriculture along the only lines compatible with progress and well-being. Twenty-five years ago Sir Horace Plunkett began preaching to his countrymen the virtues and the necessity of co-operation. For a long and heart-breaking while he found none to listen to him. The people were apathetic and sceptical; the priests, if they did not ban, did nothing to further the new movement; and the politicians adjured Sir Horace to cease his “hellish work.” Not only was he endeavouring to popularise the revolutionary conception of agriculture as a matter of production when all Irish history had declared it to be a matter of rent, but he was faced with the objection that, under the existing system of Irish land tenure, to improve the tenant’s position was merely a roundabout way of filling the landlord’s purse. However, economic truth, persuasively

The Farmer and the Future 117

and persistently preached, gradually filtered through, a creamery sprang up here, a poultry society there, an agricultural bank somewhere else. By 1894 the movement had grown beyond the effective control of a few individuals, and the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society was formed for its further direction and expansion. To-day the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society embraces over 900 societies, with a membership of all but 100,000, representing, I suppose, some 400,000 persons; its aggregate turnover from the beginning has amounted to more than £25,000,000; its annual turnover is over £2,500,000; and of the funds needed to carry it on three-fourths has been raised by voluntary subscriptions.

But the beneficence of this enterprise is not to be estimated in numbers and money alone. It has established co-operation as a fixed part of Ireland's rural economy. It has been the means of bringing men together who had either never been united before, or were united only for purposes of political agitation. It has given the small farmer his first lesson in business methods. It has conquered his distrust of himself, and his distrust of his neighbours. It was the first movement that suggested to the Irish mind that work could achieve what agitation and politics could not. Its success, and the spirit of self-reliance it was founded ^{on} and fostered led directly to the formation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. All

118 The Farmer and the Future

the movements that are to-day seeking constructive ends by non-political and non-sectarian routes derive the impulse that alone made them possible from the gospel of self-help preached by the co-operators. It has not only made for economic prosperity, but for character, tolerance, and the appeasement of the old barren contentions. It is the solitary public enterprise in Ireland that foreigners study, not as a warning, but as a fruitful guide and example. It has already put Ireland far ahead of either England or Scotland in the matter of agricultural organisation. When the Government of Cape Colony decided to promote co-operation, it was to Ireland that it turned for assistance and advice, and it was an official of the I. A. O. S. that it appointed to teach the South African farmers their business. It supplied President Roosevelt with the inspiration for his Country Life Commission, perhaps the most far-reaching and permanently beneficial of all his many enterprises. But though co-operation is now accepted as an essential condition of Ireland's rural prosperity, and though much has been done to turn its principles into practice, the field is very far from being filled up. Compared with what is to be found on the Continent, Irish agriculture can hardly at present be said to be organised at all. Another twenty years of unremitting effort may be needed before Ireland becomes a vast national trust for the production and sale of all agricultural produce. And there are two reasons

The Farmer and the Future 119

why the development of co-operation is more than ever necessary to the greatest of all Irish industries. One is that the Department of Agriculture can only achieve its best results if it is enabled to work with farmers, not as isolated individuals, but as organised and cohesive bodies. The other, and by far the more momentous, is, as I have said, that without co-operation the peasant proprietary is doomed.

But co-operation in Ireland has to encounter obstacles such as nowhere else exist. In particular, it has to face the hostility of the political machine that elects four-fifths of the representatives of the country. The Irish Nationalists have both a trade and a political objection to agricultural co-operation. They resent the building up of an organisation of 90,000 farmers on a non-partisan basis and for other than political ends. It looks suspiciously like an attempt to regenerate Ireland from within, and their case has always been that Home Rule alone can effect that miracle. It looks like an attempt to substitute practical work by Irishmen in Ireland for the magic properties of political agitation, constitutional readjustment, and English-made laws. Moreover, when 90,000 farmers, practically all of whom are Nationalists, organise themselves to promote their material well-being in spite of the opposition of their political leaders and on the advice and persuasion of a Unionist, the inference to the Dillionite type of mind is clear that the whole movement is a subtle attack upon the Irish Party.

120 The Farmer and the Future

These co-operative societies that pass no resolutions against the Saxon tyrant, and offer up no addresses to the champions of a "noble but oppressed race," but quietly attend to business, are a new and disturbing phenomenon. They hint at limits to the influence of politics, at a reaction against the policy of postponing everything to the constitutional issue, at the possibility even of revolt from the cause and its leaders.

But the political objection is not the only one. It is linked with and reinforced by the trade objection. Who are the real rulers of Ireland? The Castle, the Chief Secretary, the Under Secretary, the United Irish League, the priests, or the Ancient Order of Hibernians? Each of these may from time to time prefer a colourable claim to the title. But the claim of the country trader to be considered the constant power behind whatever may be the fashionable league or organisation or official of the moment, is in some ways stronger than them all. Uniting in himself the functions of shopkeeper, moneylender, publican, and political boss, it is the country trader who, as a rule, has the final word on the local government and economic destinies of Nationalist Ireland. As middleman, he buys the small farmer's produce at the cheapest rate and supplies him with his agricultural requirements at the dearest. As moneylender, he advances him loans on more than Asiatic terms. As politician, he acts as secretary to the local branch of the League, helps to drum up subscriptions and nominates

The Farmer and the Future 121

candidates. He overruns the boards of guardians, the rural councils, the district and county councils. He dominates the Press and the local bodies. His representatives sit in Parliament. One has to go to the multi-millionaires of the United States to find a parallel to so much political power wielded by so few hands. Numerically insignificant, the Irish country traders, living compactly in the townlets, where politics find their natural source, while the farmers are scattered over the country side, are able to impose their wishes and interests upon the community in a fashion as astonishing as it is unwholesome.

They are the instinctive enemies of agricultural co-operation. It releases the farmer from their grip. It enables him to purchase cheaply through his societies, to sell at the top price, to raise money on easy terms. It eliminates the country trader in his capacity of agricultural middleman and moneylender, and reduces him to his legitimate business of domestic shopkeeper and publican. It is of course obvious enough—and the experience of all countries that practice co-operation proves it—that you cannot benefit the farmer without in the end benefiting the trader, and that anything that adds to the farmer's power of production adds also to his power of consumption. But "the petty tyrant of the fields" in Ireland is not educated even up to this modicum of economic enlightenment. He sees the immediate loss with which co-operation threatens him. He cannot see the

122 The Farmer and the Future

ultimate and much larger gain. Although the I. A. O. S. has not yet started a single co-operative shop to compete with the village storekeeper in supplying such purely domestic articles as tea, sugar, tobacco, and so on, the country traders have fought it from the first. The only form of rural prosperity they are able to conceive is that of isolated, inefficient, unorganised farmers, living from hand to mouth under a perpetual load of debt, and lorded over by themselves as gombeen men and middlemen ; and to confirm and buttress their privileged and lucrative predominance, to keep the greatest and most vital of all Irish industries down that their own parasitic business may flourish, they have called to their assistance every agency of political pressure at their command.

That was the true secret of Sir Horace Plunkett's dismissal in 1907 from the Vice-Presidency of the Department of Agriculture. Everything else was make-believe. The real motive of the gombeen Nationalists—headed, with a propriety which all who know Ireland will be quick to appreciate, by Mr. John Dillon—was to get rid of the man who had not only taught the farmers how to organise their business, but was subsidising the co-operative movement from the official funds of the Department. The I. A. O. S. was started, and was for many years maintained, by private subscriptions only. Its expenses were necessarily heavy. It had to carry the gospel of co-operation among scattered

The Farmer and the Future 123

and backward districts, without any educational foundation to build on. It had to instruct the farmers in the scientific elements of agriculture, as well as in the principles and methods of its organisation as a business. All the preparatory work that in other countries is done by the State through the medium of technical instruction, had in Ireland to be shouldered by a few earnest individuals, relying upon private generosity for the indispensable funds. The I. A. O. S., for reasons that will scarcely surprise any one who is at all familiar with the Irish character, did not receive the financial support it should have received from the societies it formed. Those farmers whom it had not organised were unwilling to contribute towards the cost of being experimented on. Those farmers whom it had organised were equally unwilling to furnish the funds for organising others. As time went on, some of the enthusiasm that originated the movement, naturally enough, fell off. When the Department of Agriculture came into existence it took over a portion of the Society's work, annexed some of its officers—there being none others to be had who at once knew Ireland and knew agriculture—and granted it a subsidy. It is difficult enough in any country to get people to subscribe to a movement that is partially supported by the State. In Ireland it is all but impossible. From the moment the Department voted its annual subsidy, private subscriptions inevitably diminished. For some years

124 The Farmer and the Future

the I. A. O. S. was only able to carry on the greater part of its beneficent work by State aid.

It was upon the grant of this subsidy that the Nationalist M.P.s concentrated their attack. They denounced its legality. The sufficient answer was that the Auditor-General had never demurred to it. They declared that the I. A. O. S. was a political organisation, a conspiracy for "bursting up and destroying the National Party and the National movement." Alternately they urged that it was irresponsible and extravagant. But their true complaint against it was that it was a trading body, using public funds to compete with village shopkeepers. The Irish Council of Agriculture, however, a two-thirds elective body, to whose decision the whole question was referred, stood firm. It decided by a majority of over two to one to continue the subsidy to the I. A. O. S. in the form of a *pro rata* contribution, the Department regulating its grant by the amount the Society was able to raise from private subscribers and affiliated societies. Beaten in their attempt to influence Irish opinion in Ireland, the Nationalist M.P.s crossed over to Westminster to work for Sir Horace Plunkett's dismissal from the Department of Agriculture. There is no need to go into the details of a singularly unsavoury and discreditable episode. Sir Horace Plunkett was turned out and Mr. T. W. Russell was appointed in his stead.

Everybody who was interested in Ireland prophesied that one of Mr. Russell's first official

The Farmer and the Future 125

acts would be to deprive the I. A. O. S. of its subsidy. The prophecy was speedily fulfilled. When the Council of Agriculture met in November, 1907, it was found that the new Vice-President of the Department had adopted most of the Nationalist case against the I. A. O. S. He thought the subsidy "the most unbusiness-like arrangement he had ever heard of." He accepted, apparently without any inquiry, the wholly erroneous statement that the Society encouraged farmers to turn themselves into shopkeepers, with stores for groceries and general goods. He sneered at the Society for not being after all these years a self-supporting body, and he added that the demands on the Department's funds were so heavy that it was impossible to go on voting for ever from £3,000 to £5,000 a year to an outside and autonomous organisation. At the same time he did not wish to wreck the I. A. O. S. He quite approved of "non-controversial" co-operation—which is, I suppose, co-operation of so ineffectual a nature that it will be worth no trader's while to object to it. He therefore proposed a diminishing grant of £3,000 for 1908, £2,000 for 1909, and £1,000 for 1910, after which all contributions from the Department were to cease; and he frankly told the Council that if his advice were rejected, he would carry the question over their heads to Parliament—in other words, that he would override the decisions of a two-thirds elected Irish body on a purely Irish matter by an appeal to the British Parliament

126 The Farmer and the Future

Some six weeks after Mr. Russell had spoken the I. A. O. S. held its annual meeting. Sir Horace Plunkett was re-elected to the Presidency and was thus in charge once more of the movement he initiated. The tone of the meeting was bold, confident, even enthusiastic. The fervour of the early days of the movement stirred again. Its supporters faced the crisis with a high courage. They seemed even to welcome their approaching relief from official ties and to rejoice in the prospect and opportunities of an unhampered freedom. Sir Horace Plunkett reviewed the situation in a masterly and inspiring speech. Mr. Russell's proposal was accepted, but with a clear determination to make the I. A. O. S. wholly self-supporting and independent at the earliest possible moment. The sequel, even in the convulsive pantomime of Irish politics, was amazing. Sir Horace Plunkett asked a friend, Mr. T. W. Rolleston, to forward copies of his speech to American sympathisers with the co-operative movement. In doing so Mr. Rolleston accompanied one of the copies with a covering letter, written entirely on his own responsibility, in which he sketched in a few vigorous sentences the importance of co-operation and the Nationalist attitude towards it. He described the work of the I. A. O. S. as "an attempt to organise the Irish farmers to shake off the grip of the small country publican and gombeen man who has hitherto controlled the Parliamentary representation of the country,

The Farmer and the Future 127

and has used it without scruple to damage and weaken the movement for agricultural co-operation, in which the only hope of Ireland ever attaining a sound economic position lies. No sort of attack on Home Rule or upon Home Rulers as such is dreamt of. It is only insisted that Irish farmers shall not choose people who will use their power as Dillon and the rest of the Parliamentarians have been doing, to crush the farmer's movement for the better organisation of his business. That organisation will take him out of the hands of the small country trader and relieve him from an intolerable tyranny. Every effort has been made to bring about reform without a clash with the Parliamentary Party, but in vain."

This letter was forwarded by its recipient in St. Louis to Mr. John Redmond who promptly published it in the *Freeman's Journal*, an organ distinguished by the bitterness of its attacks upon the whole Plunkett movement. Its appearance created one of those invigorating sensations of which, for the liveliness of politics, Ireland has perhaps too many and England on the whole too few. Mr. T. W. Russell promptly summoned a meeting of the Agricultural Board attached to the Department, to consider the matter. It was decided that the "letters, articles and speeches" which had been provoked by it had associated the I. A. O. S. "with hostility to a political party and to certain trading interests"; that the Department should be above suspicion

128 The Farmer and the Future

of in any way sharing in this suspicion of hostility ; that, therefore, the subsidy to the I. A. O. S. should cease at the end of the current year, and that the Department itself should take steps to organise co-operative societies itself "in all the now well-understood non-controversial forms." On the strength, in short, of a private letter illegitimately published, Mr. Russell not only deprived the I. A. O. S. of half of the subsidy he had granted a few weeks before, but threatened it with the rivalry, and therefore with the direct opposition, of the Government. The significance of this threat, if it were ever to be actually enforced, hardly needs emphasising. It would mean friction where there should be mutual helpfulness. It would mean that two systems of organisation and two sets of organisers would be at work in the same field. It would mean the expenditure by the Department of a far greater sum, productive of far fewer results, than it had ever devoted to subsidising the I. A. O. S. It would mean the setting up of a central Government body to which the "non-controversial" societies might be affiliated, when the I. A. O. S. already existed fully equipped for that essential end. It would mean, on the one hand, sham co-operation, organised by untried Departmental officials in fear of the gombeen man, and on the other hand, genuine co-operation, such as obtains in Denmark, promoted and directed by men who have given the best part of their lives to the work. It would mean administrative waste, a

The Farmer and the Future 129

needless duplication of money and effort, and endless collisions and ill-feeling.

The threat was not enforced and never will be enforced. Even in Ireland; even in Irish politics, there are some absurdities which are impossible, and this is one of them. Mr. Russell, however, has steadily continued his campaign against the co-operative movement. He fought tooth and nail against the idea that the new Congested Districts Board should employ the Society to spread co-operation through the West, where it is most needed. He attacked with equal ignorance and unscrupulousness the invaluable Raiffeisen banks it has established throughout Ireland. Having failed to starve the I. A. O. S. out of existence, he sought by an astounding variety of sneers and mis-statements to cripple and discredit its work. And all the time he was a member of a Government that had made it a foremost part of their rural programme to encourage co-operation and subsidise its organisation in England, Scotland and Wales. His final exploit, with the help of the United Irish League, was to procure from the Irish Council of Agriculture in November, 1911, a vote adverse to the claim of the I. A. O. S. for a grant from the Development Fund, and endorsing his own proposal that the Department should itself undertake the work of organising "non-controversial" co-operation. His speech on that occasion was a masterpiece of venom and vanity, set off by the rankest appeal to political partisanship, and

130 The Farmer and the Future

in its insinuations and its promises deliberately disingenuous ; and for the next few months Ireland witnessed the quaint spectacle of the head of the Department of Agriculture touting for the support of the traders on behalf of a policy avowedly aimed at the interests of the farmers, flourishing testimonials from shopkeepers and moneylenders, and paying no heed whatever to the emphatic protests of the class for whose welfare he was supposed to be officially responsible. The sequel, however, was hardly worthy of so high and spirited a prelude. Mr. Russell was rash enough to submit his scheme of "non-controversial" co-operation to the Development Commissioners in March, 1912. It was promptly rejected, and two months later the Commissioners, after outlining a plan for reconstituting the management of the I. A. O. S. and cutting off such of the societies it has organised as are not wholly agricultural, recommended the Treasury to vote it an annual grant.

I have detailed this episode at considerable length, because it throws a light that really illumines upon present-day Ireland. It illustrates for one thing the solid constructive work that is being done in the country, under unexampled difficulties, by a knot of earnest and capable labourers. For another, it brings out into sharp relief the manner in which the Nationalist Party has contrived to separate itself from the opinions and interests of its followers in Ireland. For a third, it demonstrates not only the lack of sound economic

The Farmer and the Future 131

thought from which Ireland suffers even more than from the vanity of her politicians, but also the political ineffectiveness of the half-million farmers in the face of a few hundred compact and organised country traders. And finally, it emphasises the demoralisation and the inversion of all normal healthy standards caused by the withholding of self-government from a country that desires it. Very few of the Nationalist M.P.s are opposed to agricultural co-operation on its merits. But as a party, they have felt constrained to hamper and obstruct its progress for fear lest it should weaken or confuse the demand for Home Rule, and out of deference to the shortsighted pressure of a mere fragment of their supporters. When Ireland is self-governing, and opinion is free to flow in its natural channels, the farmers will unquestionably develop a political consciousness and a power of concerted action that will drive them into salutary conflict with the small trading interests that at present control the machinery of politics; and the future rulers of the country will be the men who speak and act for, and who really represent, the organised farming class.

But the spread of co-operation represents only one side of the Plunkett policy. Sir Horace long ago evolved the formula of "better farming, better business, better living," as a summary of the needs of rural Ireland. Co-operation is mainly concerned with the problems of "better business." To secure better farming it was

132 The Farmer and the Future

essential that State aid should be brought into supplement, but not to supplant, voluntary effort; and I have already described how, as the result of Sir Horace's initiative, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction came into being. I cannot attempt even a *précis* of its multitudinous activities. They cover the whole field of agricultural development and experiment and of technical education, and there is not an inch of that field that is not to-day the better for the Department's existence. When the present controversies have passed away and the proper relationship between the I. A. O. S. and the Department—under which the former would teach the technical and the latter the business side of farming—is re-established, the Irish peasant proprietor will be better placed for holding his own in the agricultural competition, will be better organised from below and in closer touch with scientific advice and assistance from above, than any other farmer in the British isles.

The third side of the Plunkett movement—that of promoting “better living,” of rehabilitating rural life as a social organism, of raising the standards of domestic economy, of making the countryside a brighter, healthier, more interesting and more intellectual place to live in—is so far the side on which least progress has been made. A few years hence, I am confident, there will be a very different tale to tell. Irish women are at length entering that too long neglected field, and entering it not as isolated individuals in

The Farmer and the Future 133

response to some vaguely benevolent call, but in organised societies, the counterpart and offspring of the I. A. O. S., affiliated to it, inspired by its spirit, and pursuing a common policy of rural redemption. That is perhaps the most hopeful and significant development which the co-operative movement in Ireland has yet witnessed; and it is powerfully aided by the arduous and fruitful campaign which Lady Aberdeen has initiated against tuberculosis and by the Health Associations she has organised to popularise the study and practice of domestic hygiene. There are no finer or more appealing pages in that wonderful brochure of wit and wisdom and pungent common sense and stirring philosophy from which I have already quoted, Mr. Russell's "Co-operation and Nationality," than those in which the author sketches all that may flow from "the beginnings of this comradeship in national effort between men and women." "With women's organisations spread over Ireland," he writes, "working in the home, the garden, the poultry yard, the schools, and making their opinions felt on public boards and the organisations of men, Irish life will be sweetened and humanised. They will bring into Ireland the desire for beauty and comfort which are the beginnings of civilisation. They will bring home to the long drugged and long dulled national conscience that the right aim of a nation is the creation of fine human beings, and not merely the production of national

134 The Farmer and the Future

wealth. . . . What women, the best women, are concerned with is the character of life. They love strength, health, vitality, kindness. They desire to see the comfortable home, the strong man coming in and out, great sons, and the laughter and roundness of well-nourished children. Women are the preservers of life, and because they have had no organised life or union of their own, because they were unable to make known their desires and needs, life has decayed in Ireland. The conditions under which children are taught in the schools, the labour of long hours without sufficient food or with none at all, thrust upon very young children whose attendance is enforced by the State ; the neglect of sanitation, the carelessness of the conveniences of life shown in the construction of cottages at long distances from a water-supply ; all these things, the effect of which is to enfeeble and impoverish life, have come about because men in Ireland have set about the business of the nation without taking women into their councils—women having had no national organisation of their own which ranged over the whole field of women's work, which would have given their opinions weight, and forced recognition of them on public bodies and the legislature. This lack of organisation the United Irishwomen will meet. Their aim is to resurrect the countryside which the blindness and passions of men have left barren and joyless." It is a pleasure merely to transcribe such glowing sentences ; and, indeed, no one who wishes to

The Farmer and the Future 135

take the height and depth of the co-operative movement in Ireland, to master its philosophy, and to understand what it is Sir Horace Plunkett has achieved for his country, can do better than read this brilliant and pregnant booklet.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST CHANCE OF THE IRISH GENTRY.

IRELAND is emerging from, precisely at the moment when England is entering, a social and economic revolution; and the fortunes and respective civilisations of the two countries, much as they have differed in the past, are likely to differ still more in the future. The time, indeed, may not be far off when many of the terms in which people have been used to speak of England and of Ireland will have to be reversed, when England will be the agitated country and Ireland the tranquil, and when we shall all be alive to the fact that in some of the most vital essentials of national well-being the smaller and poorer isle is in truth the richer and the sounder. In the history of this Irish renaissance the movement described in the last chapter will stand out with a commanding pre-eminence; and among all who have toiled and achieved for Ireland, I have little doubt that posterity will single out Sir Horace Plunkett as the man who in his day saw deepest and most clearly into the heart of one side, at any rate, of the Irish Question, who wrought the beginnings of a mighty and

triumphant revolution in the conduct of his country's principal industry, and who impregnated the Irish mind with ideas and policies that brought into existence a new social order and gave a lasting turn to the forms and spirit of Irish civilisation. And among the many beneficent consequences of his labours there is perhaps none of greater moment than the opportunity he has opened out to the Irish gentry to redeem their disastrous record by taking a leading part in building up the new Ireland that is to arise, that is, indeed, already arising, on the basis of a peasant proprietary. To recall what their record has been is necessarily to retrace part of the ground already covered in the first chapter of this book. But the repetition may be pardoned if it helps to emphasise the character and the urgency of the opportunity that now awaits them.

The rise and abject fall of her aristocracy make one of the most melancholy pages in Ireland's history. As a class their failure in almost every relation of life has been prodigious and unique. They have failed as landlords, as leaders, as the instruments of English policy and the guardians of English interests. The fault, I conceive, is far from being wholly their own. The policy they were intended to serve was vicious in principle and irresolute in practice ; the interests entrusted to their care committed them to a ceaseless warfare with their surroundings. An aristocracy in the real sense they have scarcely had any chance of being ; their functions and their proper

138 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

appellation were from the first those of a colonising caste, a privileged oligarchy, a faction imposed and upheld from without. Conquest created them; forfeitures and confiscations established them; the arms of an alien² Power have maintained them. For their unhappy beginnings and for many of its inevitable consequences they may fairly plead the excuse of the Homeric chieftain: "It is not I who am the cause of this; it is Zeus, and Fate, and the Fury that walketh in darkness." I dislike that plea; it is the too easy refuge of blindness and incapacity; but the student of Irish history has time and again to acknowledge its validity.

Who, if not Zeus and Fate and the Fury that walketh in darkness, is to be arraigned for the catastrophe that from the very moment of the Anglo-Norman invasion, from the first opening of Anglo-Irish relations, pitted feudalism against tribalism, and an English interest against the Irish people; that introduced into Ireland a body of conquerors and settlers who, while sharing the religion of the natives, differed from them in speech, in temperament, in racial characteristics, and in the fundamental cast of their civilisation; and that thus compressed the connection between the two islands into a struggle for the land between the native population and an alien, distinct and favoured colony backed by an external Power? Whose, again, is the responsibility that to these elements of contentiousness should have been added the fearful

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 139

complication of religious strife ; that the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism, broadening into a vast European struggle, should have dragged Ireland into it ; and that the conquest, the conversion, and the Anglicisation of Ireland should thus have forced themselves upon the statesmen of Elizabeth as political necessities ? Or to what person, to what class, to what policy is to be imputed the blame for all that followed, for the rebellions waged and suppressed with mutual and unsurpassable cruelties, for the seizures, the evictions, the grants of land to adventurers, the systematic plantations of Scotch and English settlers, the appalling devastations and clearances ?

Anglo-Irish history, as I read it, does not lend itself to piecemeal judgments and the petty apportionments of right and wrong. The two nations, for nearly five centuries after the Anglo-Norman invasion, were the sport of facts that could not be altered, of mischances for which neither was solely responsible, and of forces beyond the power of their single or united control. Up to the eighteenth century there is scarcely a moment or a crisis or a development on which one can lay one's finger and say, "Here, or here, was the grand, the determining mistake that altered everything." The tortuous and sanguinary tragedy seems to unfold itself with something of the inevitableness of an Attic drama, in which human volition and human agencies are enslaved to an inexorable decree.

140 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

To attempt to fix upon any particular statesman or policy the responsibility for the course and consequences of the first five centuries of Anglo-Irish relations is as futile, in my judgment, as to censure the Romans for the accident that kept the legions to Great Britain and saved Ireland from the levelling steam-roller of a Roman occupation.

The English oligarchy in Ireland, then, may claim with some force that they were not answerable for the position in which they found themselves at the dawn of the eighteenth century. The forms and structure, though not the spirit, of the native society had been utterly demolished. Over vast areas the people were dispossessed of their holdings. On either side of the agrarian struggle had been marshalled the bitterest animosities of racial and religious strife; and in a small minority of alien speech, temperament, and creed was vested practically all political power and all the privileges of a legal, social, and territorial ascendancy. And this minority, though divided against itself, menaced by the masses from below, bullied, snubbed, and preyed upon by England, succeeded for the greater part of the eighteenth century in maintaining its supremacy intact, in keeping Ireland at peace, and in promoting to a considerable degree her economic prosperity. But the instruments through which it worked were perilous in the extreme. The Catholic masses were oppressed, persecuted, practically outlawed; the Presby-

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 141

terians of the north were excluded by the Test Act from public employment ; and both Catholics and Presbyterians bitterly resented the exactions of the Episcopalian tithe-proctor. The dominant sect, however, was not so dominant as it seemed. It depended for its very existence upon the power of England, and England demanded a high price for the protection she extended. The Irish Parliament, the Irish offices, the Irish pension list were overrun with placemen from England, and every promise of Irish competition with English industries was jealously strangled.

For the first and last time the colonists developed a sense of Irish nationality. A patriot party rose in the Irish Parliament, proclaiming Irish wrongs, and forced from an England prostrated by the American Revolution an acknowledgment of Ireland's legislative, judicial, and commercial independence. That was the golden hour of the aristocracy in Ireland. For a brief and brilliant period it ceased to be an English garrison, and became a conscious and constructive force in Irish nationalism. But the hour passed. The question of the abolition of tithes and of the admission of the Catholics to the Irish Parliament, the agrarian unrest, the influence of the French Revolution upon the democratic North, and the activity of England in fostering Irish dissensions, precipitated a civil war of which the Union was the aftermath. Oligarchy from that moment was doomed to

142 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

extinction. The work of the nineteenth century in Ireland was to demolish the ascendancy of the alien minority and to transfer its powers and privileges to the native masses. Catholic emancipation, the abolition of the tithes, the disestablishment of the Church, the reform of the municipalities, the extension of the franchise, and the bestowal of local government on a popular basis, marked the stages of the revolution. But the true seat of authority in Ireland is, and always has been, the land; and it was left for the opening years of the twentieth century to drive the English garrison from its last and most formidable stronghold.

It is an inglorious record. Indeed, I know not what defence the oligarchy can prefer unless it be that it was as much sinned against as sinning, and that England, having placed it in an impossible position, lacked both the nerve and the inhumanity to uphold it; and the soundness even of that defence may be easily challenged. The Irish gentry have themselves aggravated every disability to which their situation exposed them. As missionaries of empire their failure has been little less than grotesque; they have neither coerced nor conciliated the masses of the people into attachment to British rule. The vain and barbarous hope that they might wean the Irish masses from their ancient faith has died as it deserved to die. Placed in supreme authority over a people pre-eminently aristocratic, they have proved lamentably unable to win

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 143

either their affection or respect. The popular leadership that was in their grasp they allowed to pass into the hands of priests and politicians. They might, says M. Paul Dubois, have developed and civilised the country that lay at their feet. Instead they thought only of exploiting and oppressing it. They have consistently put the rights of property above the rights of humanity. They have occupied the country, but have not governed it, or have governed it only in their own class interest. Their ascendancy has been the beginning and the end of their politics. Instead of effecting the moral conquest of Ireland, of elevating her, and of identifying themselves with her fate and aspirations, they have preferred to remain "*des étrangers et des suspects, mercenaires de l'Angleterre et parasites de l'Irlande.*" Even now their only thought is to sell what remains of their rights and privileges at the highest market price.

Such is the verdict of an accomplished and discriminating foreigner on the record of the Irish aristocracy. Nor does it by any means cover all the counts of an indictment that cannot be disputed, though it may be extenuated. As landlords the English colonists in Ireland have earned a world-wide infamy. No tie of immemorial usage, no basis of mutual attachment and reciprocal amenities, has sanctified or humanised the relationship of proprietor and tenant. Absenteeism, the rack-renting middleman, the establishment of competitive rents,

144 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

ruthless clearances and evictions, and the systematic exploitation of a land-hungry peasantry have been the chief contributions of Irish landlordism to Irish well-being. Is there in all history a class that has so missed its opportunities? The Irish gentry sold their country and its liberties for gold and titles. There is not an abuse in State or Church or in the social order that they have not sought to perpetuate, not an iniquity they have not justified, not a reform they have not obstructed. Protestantism, Imperialism, the Crown and the Constitution—they have worked them all as so many stepping-stones to place and power, as instruments to maintain their rents, buttress their ascendancy, and mislead the English electorate. Remorseless in the days of their triumph, they have borne themselves neither with dignity nor sense through the protracted stages of their downfall. We see their representatives to-day in Parliament, a dwindling and discredited band, without leaders or any positive programme, still battling for the last perquisites of privilege, still screaming for coercion, still declaiming against the “rotten, sickening policy of conciliation,” still vilifying their countrymen, still betraying in speech and bearing and policy the venom and arrogance of an alien caste.

Is this to be their final end? Are they to go down into history simply as the most stupid and sterile aristocracy that the world has yet known?—stupid because they have leaned on

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 145

England, the England that will always fail them, instead of throwing in their lot with their own people, sterile because they will not accept the revolution they cannot prevent? Is posterity to have nothing more to say of the Irish gentry as a class than that having abused all their privileges and thrown away all their chances, having earned the hatred of Ireland and the contempt of England, they pocketed their bonuses and passed sulkily into oblivion? There is the possibility that, after all, such may not be their epitaph, and that even at the eleventh hour the Irish aristocracy may escape the last reproach of Bourbonism. They have still one chance left of redemption. Their ruin is not yet irremediable. They are still, in spite of everything, the natural leaders of the people from whom they have unnaturally turned away; and Ireland, in the times that are coming, will more than ever have need of them. It is not a dream to imagine that their power of beneficent utility among a leader-loving people may yet be revived. Whatever their own blunders and shortcomings, there is, as I have said, a large sense in which history has made them what they are, the victims as well as the executants of a policy forced upon them from without; and the presumption therefore exists that as the conditions of Anglo-Irish relations change and begin, as they are beginning, to pass into a milder, mellow phase, the temper and aims and methods of the Irish aristocracy will insensibly change with them.

146 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

I have already glanced at the many converging movements which must in the end profoundly modify the spirit and politics of the old Ascendency party, break down their aloofness, sap their political strength, convince them of the impossibility of holding their own on a basis of mere negation, and sensibly temper their anti-nationalism. Of the factors that are tending to this end the most potent is unquestionably the successful operation of the Land Purchase Acts. Ireland at this moment is, indeed, the most fascinating because the most complex country in Europe; and among its many problems there is none more interesting or obscure than the probable effects of the abolition of landlordism and of the creation of a peasant proprietary upon its social and political life. I do not know whether anyone has attempted to assess, or indeed could assess with any certainty, the impetus which the Home Rule movement has derived from the land-hunger of the peasantry. But admittedly it has been very great. A wholly new phase of the demand for political autonomy was opened when it was linked on to the agrarian agitation. A wholly new phase may open again now that the crisis of the agrarian agitation is over. The Irish peasant, I am persuaded, has at least one quality in common with all peasants—a pertinacious instinct for Toryism. He is far more of a Tory than an agitator, and possibly more of a materialist than either. At any rate, once turned proprietor,

his natural conservatism is likely to be immensely intensified. Political agitation, so far as he is concerned, will have served its turn; and his mind, no longer distracted by the embittering wrangle over rent and ownership, may work in a direction it has never yet had a chance of exploring, and begin to ponder some of the actual problems of agriculture. I can conceive the Irish peasant in the not distant future, and whether Home Rule is granted or withheld, as a steadying force in the national equilibrium, mounting sentinel for law and order, ruling the labourers with a rod of iron, an authority on manures, selling his produce through co-operative societies, borrowing from local land banks, gradually effecting his escape from the toils of the gombeen man, a Nationalist and a politician, but a placid one, his pockets rigidly buttoned up against the treasurer of whatever may happen to be the fashionable League of the moment, and possibly even against the priest.

But for the present I am more concerned with the reflex action of Land Purchase upon the fortunes and temper of the aristocracy. Here, however, again one can for the most part merely speculate as to the course the future will take. One thing and one alone is certain. If the Irish gentry, having sold their estates, proceed to part with their demesnes as well, leave the country and transfer themselves to England, then their race is finally run, the curtain falls, and so far as they are concerned all is over.

148 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

But there are many inducements to a higher choice. After all, Ireland is their home and they are Irish ; the cheapness of living and the abundance of sport make their obvious appeal ; the tenants with whom they were always at war have become neighbours with whom they can live in peace ; and the former landlord who continues to reside on his demesne as a country gentleman will find ready to his hand a new and beneficent sphere of activity, a great work clamouring to be done. The Wyndham Act, as I have said, makes all the practical problems of Irish rural life a hundred times more insistent than they were. To guide, instruct and encourage the new owners of the soil, to set the peasantry on its feet, to raise the level of rural economy, and to restore to the countryside its lost amenities—these are the tasks to which the Irish gentry are called, and in the discharge of which they may yet redeem their unhappy past by taking a secure, leading and incalculably useful part in promoting future progress.

It was in this sense, with the eloquence and persuasiveness born of sincerity and great knowledge, and with an unequalled authority, that Sir Horace Plunkett, a year or two ago, addressed to the members of his class an inspiring appeal. He assured them that “the abolition of landlordism, so far from destroying the usefulness of the Irish gentry, really gives them their first opportunity, within the memory of living men, to fulfil the true functions of an aristocracy.

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 149

They have ceased to be the masters ; they are no longer dealing with dependants. My appeal to them is that they shall recognise this fact, and take their new position as men who, working among others in a rural community, have by their wealth and education special advantages which they desire to use for the common good ; and I assure them that for men who are willing and qualified to take that position it will be open." He pointed out that the Wyndham Act has cleared the ground for the erection of a new social structure. But the structure itself, its stability and the form it is to take, cannot be determined by any external agency, cannot rest on anything but the energy and good sense of the people themselves. "The moral and material progress of the country will depend upon many things, but primarily and fundamentally upon the amount of produce which the new owners extract from the land, and the business efficiency with which they dispose of it. To satisfy these conditions three things are essential. Firstly, the teachings of modern science must be applied to the practice of farming ; secondly, the business of farming must be re-organised on co-operative lines ; and thirdly, the life of those who are to do this work must be socially and intellectually elevated, and made more attractive." These are the three prerequisites of Ireland's rural advancement ; and it is open to all Irishmen, and especially to those of means, education, and position, to help in

150 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

securing them. "My point is," said Sir Horace, "that now for the first time, without any sacrifice of political opinion, without arousing any serious apprehensions of danger to religious conviction, and with immense advantage to social and material progress, problems essentially neither political nor religious, but which it will require the best thought of the country to solve, can be approached by men of all religious and political views. Without compromising their positions in any way, while improving them in many ways, Irishmen can all help to solve these problems. The altered situation will, therefore, demand a kind of leadership other than that needed for a politico-agrarian agitation; and again the people will follow the leaders they think will serve them best."

That these leaders can be and ought to be found among the Irish gentry is the kernel and culmination of the whole argument. In the three-fold scheme of teaching the farmers how to increase the output of the land and improve the breed of stock, of organising the complicated processes of modern marketing, and of rehabilitating rural life, it is the resident country gentleman who in Ireland as in France, Germany, and Denmark, is peculiarly qualified to play the leading part. In each of these directions the rough pioneer work has already been done. The activities of the Department of Agriculture, for instance, are precisely those which the landed proprietor, who has mastered the needs and possibilities of his neighbourhood, who under-

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 151

stands and can explain both the advantages and the limitations of official aid and the principles that must regulate it, and who is himself able and willing to conduct experiments in conjunction with the Department, can forward, popularise, and supplement with unrivalled effect. Then, again, the co-operative movement is one which a resident gentry, throwing themselves whole-heartedly into the work, can enormously amplify and expand. And now more than ever it needs their support and leadership. In propagating the principles and practices that can alone put the greatest of all Irish industries on a sound footing, the natural leaders of the people will find ample and fitting scope for their best energies. It is non-political work, wholly practical, and not merely important but absolutely vital to the prosperity of rural Ireland; and as the experience of many European countries has proved, no class is better qualified to encourage and direct it than a local aristocracy. Then, too, the social rehabilitation of rural life is a task that comes peculiarly within their province. The squalid and listless dreariness of the Irish countryside and of the small Irish country town is almost enough in itself to explain the emigration returns. There is perhaps no civilised country so bleakly destitute of the organised sports, relaxations, institutions and entertainments that can at least mitigate the loneliness and depression of rural existence, and promote, even though in a small degree

152 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

some sense of common interests and local unity. The Gaelic League and many other agencies are striving faithfully to fill in this appalling void in Ireland's social economy and to instil into the peasants a new conception of the embellishments and possibilities of the home; and a corresponding movement from the "big house" towards the social and intellectual elevation of the neighbourhood would be an augury of incalculable moment for the future peace and happiness of Ireland.

These, then, are the duties and opportunities that the revolution which is now being slowly wrought in Ireland opens up for the landed gentry, and the spirit and ability with which they are embraced will count heavily in the final verdict on the record of their class. As an alien caste they have confessedly failed; as a native aristocracy it is still possible for them to succeed. Even at this late hour it is open to them to make such end as is possible of the calamitous past by putting themselves at the head of the new movements that are working for unity and betterment in the future. Only so can they hope to win back as individuals the confidence and good-will they have forfeited as a class. Only so can they retrieve as Irishmen the gigantic blunders and misfortunes that pursued and ruined them as an English garrison. They may not, indeed, succeed. The undertaking is arduous, delicate, almost desperate; the popular response to their initiative may be

Last Chance of Irish Gentry 153

backward and discouraging; and their own capacities for grappling with it may prove to have been irreparably repaired by centuries of sterile strife. But, such as it is, it offers them their last chance.

I cannot tell whether they will seize it, but I am clear that they ought to. And I am not less confident that, if they do, the forces of resistance to the bureaucratic coddling that is industriously undermining what little is left of virility in the Irish character will be immensely strengthened. Ireland must surely be the most over-governed country on earth. It has become, as has been aptly said, like a gigantic creche with a whole army of officials guiding, controlling, or spoon-feeding it. The people declaim against the State, but they make haste to live on it, to pick its pockets, and to clamour for further bounties from its seemingly inexhaustible depths of spendthrift paternalism. Initiative and independence are in peril of being pampered out of existence, and as likely a forecast as any of the Ireland of the future is that it will be a land of job-worshipping, dole-loving, backboneless whimperers coaxed and petted by a host of meddling mandarins. Officials swarm over the island in an earnest and insatiable rivalry to benefit the people by robbing them of their last shreds of self-reliance. To be domiciled within range of the Congested Districts Board is almost in itself a source of livelihood. Some 50,000 agricultural labourers in Ireland have

154 Last Chance of Irish Gentry

provided themselves with brand-new cottages and a half-acre or so of land, at a rental of from nine to eighteen pence a week, with no more trouble or exertion than is needed to write a letter to the nearest district council. Old Age Pensions Acts rain down a weekly sum that may be a bare sufficiency in England, but is affluence in Ireland; Insurance Acts scatter their rare and refreshing fruits with an equally incongruous generosity; to be a small farmer in the West is to live in a golden shower of State-aid; the most popular politician is he who can invent the greatest number of pretexts for Government subsidies; lands and buildings, fruit trees and machinery, seeds and manures are to be had almost for the asking; and over large tracts of Ireland it is all but a churlish form of asceticism not to be in receipt of some form or other of departmental benevolence. If ever a people was being systematically debauched into the penny-in-the-slot view of the State and its functions, that people is the Irish of to-day; and those who hold, as I certainly hold, that the Irish question is at bottom a question of character and psychology, a question not so much of Ireland as of Irish men and women, and who believe that the real enemy to be fought is the weakening of the will-power induced by the habit of relying on external agencies, find nothing in the conditions of the country more disheartening and more productive of evil than this slavish and ubiquitous idolatry of officialdom. It can

only be countered and beaten down by preaching and practising the gospel of self-help ; and the Irish gentry who ally themselves with the various self-help movements I have mentioned will not only be acquiring a new and inspiring interest in Irish life, will not only be benefiting themselves, but will be making a signal contribution to the moral stamina as well as the material fortunes of their fellow-countrymen.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH AND THE "RELIGIOUS" ISSUE.

THE fact which dwarfs all other facts about Ireland is that she is Catholic. She is far more Catholic than is implied in the bare statement that three-fourths of her people belong to the ancient communion. She is Catholic with an intensity unequalled—unapproached indeed—by any other English-speaking people, and unsurpassed by any people anywhere. An inquirer into Irish affairs will find in this phenomenon the most delicate and baffling of all the problems that beset him. He observes at once that in Ireland the priesthood has attained to a predominance in the secular sphere of every-day life such as is scarcely rivalled even in Spain or Lower Quebec. He will endeavour, therefore, to discover how this power is used and to what extent the priests, by their training and their ideals, are fitted to wield it. He will seek to assess the influence of Catholicism upon the national character, and even to determine what type of Catholicism it is that flourishes in Ireland—whether it is the American type or the French, or more nearly approaches that which obtains in Mexico.

Recognising that among a profoundly religious people no power can be greater than that of religion, he will inevitably ask from the Church a full account of her stewardship. It will be his business to ascertain, if possible, in what way she fulfils her mission of instructing and elevating the people ; what part, if any, she plays in their political affairs ; how far her teachings or her policy equip them with the character that is essential to material or any other success ; what effect the establishment she maintains produces upon the economic vitality of the masses, and the degree in which she encourages temperance, clear-thinking, virility, joyousness.

These are not easy tasks for anyone, and for an Englishman they are peculiarly difficult. An Englishman has to burrow his way through whole mountains of prejudice and misconception before he can win to an even moderately unhampered view of the character, work, and influence of the Irish priesthood. In England itself he has hardly a single chance of learning the truth. Somewhere in the back of the average Englishman's mind is a confused idea that practically all Irish priests are little above the level of illiteracy. He is told that the education they receive at Maynooth is of the most cramping and bigoted character, and that it turns them out narrow, intolerant, drunk with power and unscrupulous in using it. He has been fed ever since he can remember on the preposterous fallacy that Home Rule means Rome Rule. He has heard of the oppressions

practised by the priests, of how they wring from the poor the moneys that enable them to build magnificent chapels in the midst of a neighbourhood of hovels, of their niggardliness in charity, of their exactions in the way of marriage and burial fees, of their lives of sloth and ease. He is inclined to put down three-fourths of Irish ills to the Irish priests. He regards them as the most dangerous kinds of agitators. He ascribes to them the lack of moral fibre that is often charged against the Irish people. He is convinced that they and their power are the greatest of all obstacles to industrialism. He profoundly dislikes and distrusts their whole organisation. He hears that no priest in Ireland will ever condescend to publish a statement of accounts ; that the Catholic laity are excluded from even the smallest share in the government of their church ; and that however praiseworthy individual priests may be, and however much credit they may justly claim for the miracle of Irish chastity, the priesthood as a whole is " seditious," anti-economic, and a blight upon the moral stamina of the people.

Before considering this indictment in detail, I should like to reproduce a rough sketch of three priests made at my first meeting with them in one of the northern counties a few years ago. The first was Father M., the curate of a wayside village, a bustling, spectacled little man, some forty years old. I lay in wait for him at a railway station, whither he was due to arrive from Dublin. What had taken him to Dublin ? The very

last thing that would have taken an English clergyman to London. Father M. had gone to Dublin to head a deputation from his district that was waiting upon the Chief Secretary for the purely secular object of procuring a Government grant for a local railway. It was he who introduced the deputation and acted as its spokesman. All the details of the scheme, the engineering difficulties of the projected line, the route it should take, the cost of its construction, the resources of the districts it would tap, the objections brought against it by rival roads—all this Father M. had at his finger-ends. He unfolded the whole plan to me as we sat in the parlour of the only really comfortable rural inn I have ever come across in Ireland ; it was not—need I add ?—kept by an Irishman. And then the talk went on to other things, to books and education and village banks and co-operative creameries. Father M. showed me a few volumes he had picked up that morning at the second-hand bookshops by the Dublin quays. He was, he admitted, somewhat of a bookworm. He had a library of nearly three thousand volumes. The reading habit had clung to him since the days of his professorship in an Irish Catholic college. He had even tried to popularise it among his people by allowing them to take out volumes from his shelves, but the experiment had not answered. Was it, I asked, mainly a theological library ? By no means. The theological books reposed dustfully on the upper shelf ; novels, belles-lettres, history,

the classics, Huxley and Spencer mingled boldly below. But his great hobby was the co-operative movement. There was very little about agriculture that he did not appear to know—"and why shouldn't I, being a peasant's son myself?" He had started a village bank; he had started a co-operative creamery; and both were flourishing institutions. Goodness and practicality beamed from behind the little man's spectacles. That he had not the polish of the drawingroom was true enough, but in competency, in genuineness, in enthusiasm, and in sound common sense he would have taken a place anywhere. As he sped homeward on his bicycle, I had an immense conviction that his people were in good hands.

And then there was Father M.'s immediate superior, the parish priest, a grey-haired, hearty, all-knowing veteran, upon whom I uncereemoniously stumbled while waiting his curate's return. His door was ajar, and a voice from the depths of the house bade me come in when I knocked. I found him sitting in a bare, disorderly room, a glass of water and a loaf of bread standing on the table amid a litter of books and papers. He held forth for a while on land and farming as though he were one of the Estates Commissioners. Then he passed on to travelling, and told me how he had just returned from a tour through Italy. "Rubbing up your classics, Father?" I asked him. He hoped, in reply, that they did not need much rubbing up,

and I quickly found that they did not. He was strong on temperance, one of the leaders in the campaign which the Church has somewhat tardily organised and is not very effectively waging against the most pervasive of Irish failings. "His own," as they say in Ireland, had nearly all taken and kept the pledge, and the local publican was hard put to it to make both ends meet. Remember, we were six miles from any railway, in a district not indeed very poor, but quite remarkably isolated. And here was this priest, a real father to his people, reading the classics and fighting drunkenness. He came down to the roadway with me in the pleasant Irish fashion, and chatted for a while with my driver, criticising his horse and passing his hands down its legs with expert familiarity—a most adequate man, in touch with every interest of his people.

In a near-by town I found, a day or two later, another type of priest, or, rather, a variation on the Father M. type. He was, I should judge, about forty-five years old, a zealous antiquarian who had written many books and pamphlets on the round towers, old crosses, ruined abbeys and castles of the neighbourhood. But that was merely a side issue in his busy, practical life. He was a firm believer and an untiring worker in the cause of industrial betterment. The Department of Agriculture co-operates with local committees appointed by the county councils throughout the country. This priest served on his local committee with

assiduity and intelligence; I believe he practically ran it. But he was far from confining himself to these more or less official duties. Any project of material improvement that stood a reasonable chance of success had his active support. When I visited him he had just organised and completed what amounted almost to a house-to-house canvass of his town for the purpose of raising £10,000 to start a small linen-weaving mill, and of that sum £6,000 had already been obtained. To encounter three such priests within the space of a week—alert, level-headed, well-informed, intensely practical men, each trying in his own way to leave the world a little better than he found it—would have forced the most unmitigated Englishman to revise some of his preconceptions.

I do not say that these three priests were typical of the whole body, and even if they were, it might still be necessary to insist that an organisation is something very different from the sum of the individuals who compose it. One comes across, as a matter of fact, a few priests in Ireland, and one hears and reads of a good many more, who make a decidedly less pleasing impression, who are bullies, agitators, not over-scrupulous, and unwholesomely materialised. The quick mind and vivid pen of George A. Birmingham have given us, in "The Seething Pot" and "Benedict Kavanagh," some striking portraits of both types. But taking them as a whole, they are a remarkable set of men, whose

chief shortcoming, in my opinion, is not so much that they abuse their unrivalled authority, as that they do not always direct it to the best ends. The sons, in the main, of peasants, small farmers and petty traders, educated in a seminary that is exclusively theological, it is inevitable that their horizon should be narrow, their stock of knowledge and of culture inadequate to the position of variegated and almost undisputed power in which they find themselves placed, and that their manners and style of living should sometimes fail to set an example of refinement and finish. But they are almost invariably gentlemen in the essentials, if not in the accessories, of character and conduct; they lead the fullest and most human of lives; I have rarely encountered any men in whom the social and hospitable instincts were more developed; and in their relations with women their record is absolutely without stain.

"They are no anchorites," an Irish lady (Mrs. Katherine Tynan) has written, "no austere possessors of a spiritual joy far removed from human sources. They are men and brothers to their flocks; they are open-air persons; they love the gaieties of the country and the people; they dine out; they are leading—one had almost said *the* leading—figures at weddings and christenings; they are sportsmen; they love a race meeting or a game of cards; they enjoy a good dinner and a glass of punch to follow. Yet it is in the midst of his social, and

one may say material enjoyments, that the high vocation of the Irish priest is, to my mind, so manifest. I have looked on at and taken part in hundreds of card games where priests were among the players. In all my experience, I cannot recall one instance in which a priest was greedy, ill-tempered, or anything but a gentleman and a sportsman, winning and losing with cheerful equanimity, and displaying the utmost patience with other players less well-mannered and good-hearted than himself. I have seen them on the race-courses, dispensing their wonderful hospitality, spreading geniality as they went about among friends and neighbours, 'putting their bit' in a sweepstake, and enjoying their losing or winning with the same cheerful equanimity as at the card table." The picture is an attractive one, but I do not find my Irish friends over-ready to endorse it. They greet it rather with a good humoured smile as a somewhat fanciful sketch of a type of priest now fast disappearing to make room for a less mellow and jovial, a more self-centred and material generation.

In Ireland, more even than in most countries, the past is the key to the present. That is an axiom one needs especially to bear in mind when approaching the subject of the Irish priesthood. Their power is not an accident; its roots lie far back in Ireland's history; a melancholy succession of events have confirmed and buttressed it; step by step it is possible to trace the causes that have made the priests the only leaders, until

recently, that the Irish masses have ever had. And if there is one class that has forfeited the right to complain of the breadth and depth of priestly predominance it is surely the Irish gentry, who, placed in supreme authority over a people pre-eminently aristocratic, have proved lamentably unable to win either affection or respect, and have allowed the popular leadership which was in their grasp to pass into the hands of the clergy and the politicians. The whole tangled and insensate tale of Irish history with its forfeitures and confiscations, its colonies and clearances, its rebellions and repressions, its penal laws and persecutions, its ruthless rule of the old ascendancy party, lies behind the secular influence which the Catholic Church wields in the Ireland of to-day. The Irish priest has not to struggle for power; it comes to him as a birth-right; it is one of the least disputable legacies of the tumultuous past. What is it, one might almost ask, that the priest is not? All education is in his hands; the penal laws have bequeathed to him a distinctive sanctity; his office is regarded with a reverence not altogether free from superstition: spiritual shepherd, teacher, politician, land agent, family lawyer, man of affairs—from the cradle to the grave he touches the realities of Irish life at every conceivable point.

On such a matter the impressions of a casual visitor must necessarily lack that intimacy of acquaintance which can alone give them value. I fall back on the ampler knowledge, the wide

and sympathetic elucidations of one who, though a foreigner, has made a profound study of Irish problems, and has also the advantage of being a Catholic. M. Paul Dubois, in his "*L'Irlande Contemporaine*," is nowhere happier than in his analysis of the relations between priests and people. "Under Elizabeth and Cromwell, under the penal laws," he writes, "the priest suffered with the people. He remained faithful to them unto death and martyrdom. Thus were friendship and union sealed between priest and people. The priest gained for ever the gratitude and veneration of the people; he became their guide, their friend, their protector, and won that title which he still bears, *Sagart a rúin*, the beloved priest. Nothing could be more touching to see than this attachment which still exists, this respect, this confidence, this intimacy between the priests and his parishioners. . . . He seems to be a king in his kingdom, affable, courteous, tolerant with non-Catholics, familiar with his flock, above all, 'popular.' He is in truth the father of his people, and no doubt a father who is sufficiently authoritative. He is the arbiter of their quarrels, the confidant of their secrets. To him they turn for advice whether in affairs of the heart or the pocket. In return the people are ready to do him any service and to render him any homage. . . . There is no stiff haughtiness, no wall of stone separating them from their flock; they make themselves loved by their good grace and their ruggedness at need. . . .

The Irish priest is not merely the spiritual shepherd, he is the guide and counsellor in temporal affairs. The facts of history have made him a leader, and often the sole leader, of the people."

But to all this there is another and less pleasing side. It has been stated with pungent illumination by "Pat" in his "Economics for Irishmen," a vivid and original volume that will only be out of date when Ireland has been unimaginably transformed. "The world," says "Pat," "has hardly a more beautiful example of Faith than the grey patrician of fifty generations bowed for the blessing of the new-made curate, who may have started from the stable; but when that curate has 'got his parish,' expands his exclusive judgment on religion into his exclusive judgment on everything else, lays down the law on all things for patrician and plebeian alike, dictates his 'policy' to the statesman, his fees to the doctor, his voting to the citizen, their 'opinions' to the public, and so turns his sacred privilege into a secular weapon—then the highest things we know of are dragged into the dirt, and character, economic and otherwise, is sunk under a confusion of standards that tend to make the individual a machine rather than a man, with Heaven itself pressed into the process of human demoralisation. That is what we have to-day in Ireland, at least in a measure large enough to assure our economic decay, and so helpless is 'the nation' against it that useful men, good

Catholics, can have their dismissal dictated by the priest, and be driven out of Ireland for nothing more than uttering their opinions on lay matters peculiarly their own, admittedly in accordance with the liberty defined to them by their Faith. . . . Nothing is more firmly fixed in the minds of many shopkeepers and their peasant customers than that the prosperity or destruction of their business is at the will of the priest, and I know of numerous families that have been impoverished in this way, while others have risen from misery to wealth through the priest's partiality. In many places it is enough to know simply that the priest does not wish the people to go to a certain shop. The wish becomes generally known in some way, and then down goes the shop, often the shop of a good fellow, while a pious ruffian prospers under clerical approval on the other side of the street. While it is accepted as if an article of Faith that the will of the priest means success or ruin to a man's business, how can we have the freedom that produces character or the character that produces economic progress?"

These are the views of an Irishman and a Catholic. I find them substantially endorsed in a letter I received not long ago from an Irish Protestant, a singularly liberal and enlightened statesman, who has made many effective contributions to Irish well-being. "Sacerdotalism," he writes, "is my bugbear, the one factor in the case that makes me sometimes despair. It shows

no sign of weakening ; on the contrary, I think it gathers strength. But it cannot last for ever. The people hate and resent it ; and though but few Irish return from the United States to settle in Ireland, American modes of thought must percolate into Ireland. My dread is that it will last long enough to neutralise the good effects of peasant proprietorship and other reforms ; and that the influence of the priest in the legitimate field of faith and morals will perish along with his power in purely secular affairs. The rebound into irreligion of a people such as the Irish would be very serious. It is a vast pity that we have in Ireland no Roman Catholic in a position analogous to that of the Duke of Norfolk in England, one who could represent at Rome the fact—I am sure it is a fact—that a revolt against religion will surely take place if the interference of the hierarchy and the priest in temporal affairs is not checked. . . . In what I have said about sacerdotalism do not misread me as applying it to all bishops and priests. I believe the majority are good though ignorant men, anxious for the welfare of the country, and concerned only for the spiritual and moral condition of their flocks. But the militant temporal bishops and priests dominate the majority, and they have all the strings of the money-bags and of the Press in their hands. If the priests would preach and preach, and keep on preaching (1) love of truth, (2) sense of duty, (3) the necessity of nourishing

the body as well as the soul, (4) that stewed tea and white bread are poison to children, (5) the dignity of labour, and (6) cleanliness—Ireland would be a very different country in ten years."

It may be doubted, however, whether the Catholic Church at all desires Ireland to be "a very different country." As devout Catholics, putting the Church before any mundane interest, they have every reason to be satisfied with Ireland and the Irish people, and, I will add, the British Government in Ireland, just as they are. From the point of view of the Church there can hardly be any change that is not a change for the worse; in the eyes of a zealous hierarchy the Ireland of to-day must be very nearly the ideal country. The people dwindle, but the Church thrives; emigration continues, but those who are left behind seem to yield themselves more and more to priestly guidance and authority. Convents and monasteries multiply, Irish missionaries scatter over the world, the wealth and power and property of the Church grow from year to year, and British statesmanship has thoroughly assimilated the maxim that the road to peace lies in governing Ireland with and through the priesthood. Protestant England is, indeed, one of the main bulwarks of the secular power of Irish Catholicism. Every official in the country, from the Lord Lieutenant to an inspector on the staff of the Board of Works, quickly learns that to get anything done he must have the Church on his side. Every Secretary of State

soon becomes aware that the bishops and their subordinates are the most useful friends or the most powerful enemies—and never more powerful than when they appear to be altogether indifferent and in the background—of the policies he projects. There is hardly a Board, or Council, or Committee anywhere in Ireland, outside of a corner of Ulster, that is not directly or indirectly swayed by clerical influence. Whatever party is in power in Great Britain the Church acts largely as its intermediary in the government of Ireland, distributes no small proportion of the official patronage, and may always be sure that its wishes and representations will be listened to with the most cordial deference.

In that eminently beguiling, thoughtful and penetrating work, "The Pope's Green Island," by Mr. W. P. Ryan, I find this passage:—"It has been said that the most brilliant thing ever done by the Irish priests was the invention of the legend that they had been always on the side of the people. And I sometimes think the most brilliant and mordant touch of English irony is not in English literature but in English government and life—getting Rome to try to 'keep us good' on the one hand, and on the other putting the priest in pride of place over our schools and the teachers of our youth, and then inveighing against Rome Rule, and calling us a priest-ridden people." But what completes the paradox of the situation is the blank unconsciousness of the mass of Englishmen that they have

any responsibility in the matter. Their instinct is still to believe that Home Rule means Rome Rule; they seem almost incapable of understanding that it is English Rule and nothing else that means Rome Rule, and that the English system, policy or trick of ignoring the Catholic laity in Ireland and of dealing over their heads with the Church direct, is the factor that beyond all others supports and perpetuates the temporal authority of the Irish hierarchy. There is scarcely a branch of Irish education in which Protestant England has not shown herself more Catholic than any Catholic power on earth, more complaisant to the priesthood, more indifferent to the views and needs of the people, more prompt to sell them into mental serfdom in return for political tranquillity. It is not merely the enthronement, it is the apotheosis of Rome Rule at which British Governments of all parties have connived since the Union became a fact. The Church has used England and the English connection, and the bargains to which that connection gives rise, as its most effective barriers against the laity; and England has used the Church as a sort of unofficial police to head off agitation and to calm discontent. Nothing will break up that alliance or put clericalism in its proper place, or allow democracy to come to fruition in Ireland but self-government. Home Rule, so far from spelling Rome Rule, spells Rome Ruin.

The more candid or the less discreet among

Unionists have never concealed their faith in the Church as an instrument for warding off the Nationalist movement. Lord Randolph Churchill openly avowed it. "It is the bishops entirely," he wrote in 1885, "to whom I look in the future to turn, to mitigate, or to postpone the Home Rule onslaught. Let us only be enabled to occupy a year with the Education question. By that time, I am certain, Parnell's party will have become seriously disintegrated. Personal jealousies, Government influences, Davitt and Fenian intrigues, will all be at work on the devoted band of eighty; and the bishops who in their hearts hate Parnell and don't care a scrap for Home Rule, having safely acquired control of Irish education, will, according to my calculation, complete the rout. That is my policy, and I know that it is sound and good, and the only possible Tory policy. It hinges on acquiring the confidence and friendship of the bishops. . . . My own opinion is that if you approach the archbishop through proper channels, if you deal in friendly remonstrance and in attractive assurances . . . the tremendous force of the Catholic Church will gradually and insensibly come over to the side of the Tory party." The prophecy has not gone altogether unfulfilled. The Church has been given a control over education, and an authority in the daily work of administration, such as it hardly possesses in any other land; and in return it has consistently, but not always effectively, interposed a moderat-

ing and pacifying influence between the people and their rulers. Its spirit, in Ireland as elsewhere, is and must be essentially conservative; and to-day, strictly in proportion to its growth in wealth and property, it is more conservative than ever. It does not stand, and never has stood, for real Nationalism or real democracy. The Union was carried largely by the influence of the bishops in return for the promise of emancipation, and though priests and people worked together for the removal of many specifically Catholic grievances, the policy of the Church for the past sixty years has been distinctly Roman and not Irish or Gallican; and the hierarchy has only kept the goodwill of successive British Governments at the cost of straining the confidence and sympathy of large masses of the laity. The Church on the whole has thought far more of itself than of Ireland. Individual priests have often and genuinely stood for Nationalism, and in a few rare cases may even have been sufficiently democratic as to contemplate popular control over education. But the hierarchy, while always inflexible on the school question, has never allowed its sympathies with Nationalism to override or interfere with its primal duty of safeguarding Catholic interests; and Michael Davitt had reason on his side when he launched his bitter gibe about "the new English garrison of priests and nuns."

It would be perhaps too blunt a way of putting it to say that the Church in Ireland is for Home

Rule only so long as it is sure of not getting it. But it is at least certain that its attitude towards the political issue is and always has been highly equivocal. The influence of many scores and hundreds of the younger priests, whose Nationalism is as undoubted as their popularity; the apprehensions aroused by the multiplying bonds between the Irish Nationalist party and the English Labour party, and by the certainty that British legislation will be directed with a constantly increasing decisiveness against property and against clericalism; the extreme probability that an Irish Parliament would be a Tory Parliament and an instinctive upholder of vested interests, and that Ireland under Home Rule would be less exposed to the subversive and rationalising spirit of British politics and British literature—these are factors that would urge the Church to accept and advocate autonomy. But the factors pulling the other way are stronger. A people possessed of self-government, unless all history is a lie, is a difficult team for a Church to drive, and the priesthood under Home Rule could not hope to retain the power it wields at present. Already there are incipient signs of anti-clericalism. The whole Irish-Ireland movement is impregnated with a spirit, and is forming a type of character, that are instinctively though not so far avowedly, hostile to sacerdotal rulership in the secular affairs of life. Agricultural co-operation and technical instruction are likewise developing backbone and self-reliance. The

County Councils accept the co-operation of the priests, but no longer follow their lead as automatically as they did. The mass of the people continue to pay their dues, but they are beginning to grumble and inquire. An educated laity is revealing a suspicious interest in educational problems, and in spite of the new University, with its wealth of professors and paucity of lectures and students, Trinity has to-day more Catholic undergraduates on its books than ever.

Peasant proprietorship, again, means, not only a new social order, but the inevitable, if tardy, emergence of a new set of ideas, none of which are likely to be favourable to priestly authority. If Ireland had Home Rule no power on earth could prevent these forces—at present faint and dispersed—from combining into a formidable, and in the end a successful, onslaught, first, upon the clerical hold over the schools, and secondly, but long afterwards, upon the congregations. With a Parliament in session on College Green the Church might feel that it possessed a greater security for its property than any that is likely to be forthcoming when Labour holds the balance of British politics and both Liberals and Conservatives are bidding for its support. But it would feel at the same time that the flood-gates had been opened to democratic impulses threatening its secular privileges, and that from being the ally of the British Government its position had shifted to that of an object of contention and attack in the political life of Ireland. It is

not merely a desire to gratify the Vatican, which is indifferent to Ireland but enormously interested in England, by not depriving English Catholics of the Parliamentary support of the Nationalist party, that influences the Church against Home Rule. It is, above all, that in its own mind its temporal and spiritual powers are inseparably linked, and that Home Rule must first loosen and then destroy its absolute and deeply cherished control of education.

One may, therefore, with some confidence surmise that had the Home Rule Bill of April, 1912, proved unsatisfactory to the average Nationalist, had it withheld, for instance, all power in fiscal matters from the Irish Parliament, had its financial provisions been regarded as inadequate, had it been possible to represent it, like the Councils Bill of 1907, as "a sham and an insult to the Irish people," the Church would have done nothing to facilitate its passage into law, might even perhaps have assumed the mantle of outraged patriotism, but more probably would have looked on with tacit encouragement while the Sinn Feiners and the O'Brienites engineered its rejection. But as the Bill gave to the Irish all that their political leaders asked for, and as it succeeded, for the time at all events, in striking the imagination and capturing the enthusiasm of the masses, and was by them accepted as a genuine and sufficient grant of self-government, the Church did not and could not oppose it, knowing that to have

done so would merely have advertised once more the fact that in the face of a National movement, and when the passions of the people are really aroused, its power to influence or restrain disappears, and that nothing is left for it but submission and patience. The political authority of Catholicism in Ireland is great, but it is not illimitable. It is only in regard to questions which fail to touch the interests or emotions of the masses that the lead of the Church is accepted and followed unmurmuringly. But then it must be admitted that the questions that really appeal to the Irish masses and draw forth the fire and lay bare the hidden granite in the national character, are very few in number. The land, however, is one of them. The Church denounced the Land League and the Plan of Campaign and the crimes and disorders that accompanied them but its denunciations were swept aside in the torrent of popular fervour. Only a few years ago cattle-driving continued and thrived in spite of the opposition of the priests. In the crisis that followed the downfall of Parnell, the Church and large sections of the people came into fierce and bitter conflict, and though the Church triumphed, it was only after a struggle that for a time tore the country in twain. The Irish Catholic is by no means the most tractable of individuals—he has always, for instance, sharply resented and defeated the attempts of the Vatican to take a hand in Irish politics—and Ultramontaniam will never find in Ireland a footing one-

half so secure as in Spain or Austria. Whenever you find clericalism in unchallenged control of any department of Irish life or thought, as you find it, for instance, in the sphere of education, it may be a proof of the subserviency of the people, but it may also be a proof merely of their indifference.

On the whole, therefore, it would seem as though the Church had as good reason to be satisfied with itself, and its situation, and Ireland and the Irish people, and the British Government, as any church these days can hope to have, and that it would be quite content to go on with things as they are. An onlooker, however, can only share this satisfaction after certain deductions. I have already noted some of the disastrous effects upon primary education of the British Government's alliance with the forces of Irish ecclesiasticism. Every national schoolmaster in Ireland, whether Catholic, Episcopalian, or Presbyterian, is the creature of the clerical manager, appointed, promoted, and dismissed by him at will. Carry this system into the secondary and intermediate schools, and higher up into the colleges, and the historical results follow; lay learning, even Catholic lay learning, is banned and boycotted; the teaching congregations swoop down upon and monopolise the whole field of instruction; the pernicious bait of payments by results turns education into cramming, and pours thousands of pounds a year into the coffers of unaudited, irresponsible orders;

the laity are excluded from Maynooth ; mixed education, that great dissolvent of social and sectarian strife, is denounced as treason to the Faith ; and the whole guidance, not alone of the beliefs and morals, but of the intellect of the youth of Ireland, becomes a priestly, monastic, and conventual preserve. To have placed Irish education absolutely in the hands of the Irish priesthood is, in my judgment, the gravest of the many crimes and blunders for which British rule in Ireland is responsible. The blind cannot lead the blind, and an inexperienced, uninstructed and uncultured priesthood is of all agencies the least fitted to guide the intellectual destinies of a nation. To none of its functions do the Irish clergy of all sects cling so tenaciously as to this ; in none are they less willing to admit the co-operation of laymen ; and yet with none have they proved themselves so little able to deal successfully. I freely grant that the Irish priests are set to work what is probably the worst educational chaos in Europe, but no one who has looked into the matter at first hand, or who has even been at the trouble to read the inspectors' reports, can doubt that the negligence, indifference, and incapacity of the clerical managers have intensified all its defects. Except perhaps in the case of the Christian Brothers, the Catholic Church in Ireland is a blight upon—one might almost say the enemy of—a modern and efficient system of education.

It is, indeed, but too clear that throughout

the whole educational controversy of which Ireland has been the victim the Church has fought and intrigued for its own hand and with a single eye to the extension of its influence and prerogative as an organisation, and that its interests have at no time been identical with those of the Catholic laity. As was shown by the ban placed upon the Queen's Colleges, which the great majority of laymen were perfectly willing to accept, and later on by Dr. Newman's unhappy experiences as the head of a Catholic University, the Church in Ireland has been concerned not with education but with its own control over it. But even in its most sanguine moments it could hardly have anticipated such a time as the present when, without a vestige of lay interference, it dominates all the elementary schools, converts secondary education into a gold-mine for ecclesiastical seminaries, finds students for the priesthood supported out of public moneys intended for technical instruction, and is placed by a Liberal Government in indirect but none the less effective authority over the new University, an institution whose capacity to cope with a modern educational curriculum may be gauged from the fact that it has endowed a chair of scholastic philosophy. All Ireland suffers from this dire compression of its character and intelligence into the straight-waistcoat of clericalism; but if there is one class or body that is in a particular sense its victim, it is the teachers in the primary schools. The priest

is the manager of all the schools in his parish ; he appoints the teachers and dismisses them as he pleases ; their absolute subjection to his authority and notions is often the only aspect of the educational question that really engrosses him. The average priest rarely visits the schools under his charge ; their lighting and heating and general equipment are details that he comfortably ignores ; there is no guarantee because he signs papers and reports that he has ever read them ; and even in the teaching of religion he is surprisingly negligent. The one point on which he tenaciously insists is that the teachers shall be his unquestioning bondsmen and lackeys. It is notorious that many priests put up the post of teacher to auction and knock it down to the highest bidder, and that many more levy a percentage on the salaries of their nominees precisely as Tammany Hall exacts a fixed yearly contribution from its henchmen in the municipal service. The wretched teachers, knowing that their bread and butter depends on subservience to the local manager, become little less than menials in his employment, a staff of out-door servants, ready at any moment to run the priest's errands, to do the work of a parish clerk, to act as collectors for the chapel funds, to organise bazaars, to assist in the choir, or to take over the superintendence of the Sunday School. The dignity of one of the noblest of professions is thus dragged in the dirt ; manliness, self-respect, and mental freedom are crushingly penalised ;

and the minds and character of the childhood and youth of Ireland are moulded by those who dare not display either mind or character of their own.

And what are the qualifications of the average Irish priest for the intellectual guidance of his parishioners? What sort of a training and education has he himself received? Probably he was marked out for the priesthood from childhood by parental choice. The great ambition of a peasant family in Ireland is that one of its sons should be a priest. This is partly due to an inborn sense of piety and partly to a shrewd desire to minister to the importance and dignity and the future material interests of the family. The budding Levite has an easy time in his youth. He is spared the rough work of the farm. At twelve or fourteen he is sent to the local seminary, an ecclesiastical secondary school manned by ill-educated young priests, fresh from Maynooth, who have had no grounding in pedagogics, whose ambitions are pastoral and not educational, and whose main anxiety is to get promoted as quickly as possible to parish work. At Maynooth, where he spends the seven vital years that lie between eighteen and twenty-five, the future priest, remembering the power and responsibility that will be his in after-life, cannot be said to receive an ideal, or anything like an ideal, training. The staff of professors is not highly qualified. Their selection, though nominally competitive, is usually decided by

a vote of the bishops, many of whom not infrequently undertake a personal canvass on behalf of their nominees. That incompetent men should find their way into the faculty is under such a system inevitable. One hears from reminiscient graduates strange tales of Greek odes, reprinted in the Centenary Celebration Album without accents, because neither the episcopal editor of the publication nor the Professor of Greek were in a position to undertake their accentuation; of a successful candidate for the chair of English Literature and Language who could not explain Grimm's Law; of a Professor of dogmatic theology who always quoted the Rev. Mr. Cook, of Boston Monday Lecture fame, as the final authority on modern science; of students ordained for the priesthood who had never succeeded in mastering the elementary catechism, and were incapable of translating their Latin text-books; of the infinite spinning of casuistical webs; of a curriculum rigidly held down to mediæval philosophy to the exclusion of modern thinkers; of years of painful wandering through the logical mazes of moral theology from fantastic premisses to impossible conclusions; and of all healthy freedom of thought, research and discussion denied to students and professors alike. It is a system eminently calculated to stunt and stupify the most brilliant intellect, and the moral and social atmosphere in which it is carried on intensifies rather than corrects its weaknesses. The students are as little trusted at Maynooth

as in a French *internat* ; their lives are governed by a code of petty rules and espionage that lower self-respect and encourage hypocrisy ; and the reservations and equivocations that are frequently the fruit of an elaborate course of casuistry tend in many cases to confuse the sense of honour. Some twenty per cent. of the students, I have heard it said, leave before ordination ; and of those who remain it is not uncharitable to suppose that some at least, though they have lost the simple peasant faith with which they entered college, lack the courage to face a difficult struggle in the competitive secular world with their inexperience and defective intellectual equipment, and compromise with themselves for the sake of an easy life.

Emerging from the discipline and tutelage of Maynooth, where he has not read even a newspaper and where conversation among the students is mainly concerned with diocesan gossip and the possibilities of preferment, the newly appointed curate, by virtue of the traditional reverence felt for his office, finds himself suddenly transferred to a position not merely of independence, but of authority and power. Rejoicing in his freedom and unaware of his ignorance, his pronouncements on questions of politics, education, economics, and so on necessarily at first lack finality. But in the majority of cases matters adjust themselves ; the priest grows accustomed to his independence ; he learns to accept it as a fact that many of his parishioners are better

informed than he has had any chance of being ; and he settles down quietly to the routine of his calling. The ordinary Irish priest is far from being the violent and obstreperous agitator or tyrant of the English imagination. He performs his sacerdotal duties, lives frugally, does a little farming, has a fondness for money which the people are coming more and more to resent, likes power, but chiefly on the condition that it can be exercised without publicity. In the Church, as in most organisations, it is the safe and supple man who gets preferment, and the priest with one eye on the parish and the other on his bishop, the fount of all patronage and promotion, soon learns that any singularity of conduct or opinion, any excess of zeal or abuse of authority that brings him into notoriety, is apt to operate as a bar to advancement.

It is the bishops who determine the policy of the Church, and the method of their selection insures that they shall be men, as a rule, versed in affairs, sagacious, adroit, prudent, and of good repute. The parish priests of a vacant diocese submit three names to the bishops of the province. The bishops recommend one of them to Rome, and the choice of Rome, while theoretically unfettered, is largely guided in fact by the advice of the local episcopacy. A parish priest who aspires to a bishopric must, therefore, first of all cultivate the good-will of his brother priests, and if he is a good fellow, with a sound sense of hospitality, and a reputation for the kind of

learning prized by the ecclesiastical mind, and is able to diffuse the idea that he would prove a lenient bishop with a proper regard for the rights of the priests beneath him, he stands an excellent chance of being put forward as one of the three nominees. But to insure his election, it is necessary that he should stand well with his bishop, and become known through him to the other bishops of the province ; and the qualities most likely to carry with them episcopal favour and backing are those of tactful flattery, meek and unquestioning obedience, a capacity for avoiding mistakes and escaping criticism, and skill in the arts of managing men. There is no power in Ireland quite so autocratic as that of the bishop within the limits of his diocese ; the most arrogant, bumptious and independent of priests is humility itself in its presence. The priest is even more the submissive bondsman of the bishop than is the school teacher of the priest. Against his ecclesiastical superior he has no rights ; he must obey every order however extravagant ; he must pocket every insult and crawl for favours ; the unforgivable sin is that he should hold opinions contrary to those of his bishop ; and preferment goes to those who have most fully schooled themselves to a judicious sycophancy. A priest with views of his own on mixed education or village libraries or lay control of the schools may as well abandon all hope of promotion. An Archbishop has even been known to ruin a priest for refusing to buy whisky from a publican married to the Archbishop's niece.

Jealous of one another the Irish bishops form none the less a close corporation to maintain and defend their immense powers; and a priest who offends one offends all. With few exceptions they have little real culture, and their contributions to literature and even to theology are negligible. Peasant-born and Maynooth educated, the majority of them are men of mediocre mind, rather openly vain of their position, inclined to be overbearing in manner, remarkably skilful in negotiating with an English Chief Secretary, masters of all the arts of political intrigue, and, as diocesan administrators, chiefly concerned with the raising and spending of money. For a poor country like Ireland they appear to enjoy large incomes and their pleasure in the pomp and display of ecclesiasticism, in the lavish entertainments and functions that accompany the reception of nuns, the ordination of priests, and above all the consecration of a bishop, is almost child-like in its candour. It was one of their order who in returning thanks for a carriage and pair that had been presented to him, delightfully remarked:—"It is a very suitable gift for me as your bishop; such a gift as St. Paul would have appreciated had he been a bishop in these days." One can imagine St. Paul's feelings on being offered an expensive present bought by the subscriptions of a poor people—subscriptions that in all probability had been wheedled out of their reluctant pockets by some ambitious priest anxious to curry favour

with his patron. No petty German princeling, I have heard it said, is more jealous of his dignity than the Irish successors of the fisherman Apostle ; and priests have been often reprimanded for not interlarding their sentences with "My Lord," and "Your Lordship"—titles which even in the familiar intercourse of bishops among themselves are never dropped.

The Irish are a genuinely religious people, with a deep fund of spiritual, poetic and mystical emotionalism. They are Catholics in practice as well as name. The memory of the days when Catholicism was a proscribed religion, and when Catholics felt bound in honour to make open profession of their faith in the face of all risks still survives, and attendance at Mass on Sunday and at Communion at least once a year is the established custom both among men and women. Social and family ostracism, apart from ecclesiastical censure, operates to keep the peasantry faithful to their religious observances. Half-Pagan beliefs in luck and magic urge others to fulfil their duties. Temporal as well as spiritual evil is feared by those who absent themselves from the ceremonies of the Church. If cattle die it is frequently attributed to their owner's neglect of Mass. "Sure he couldn't have any luck, he never goes to Mass," is a common expression. In the towns and among the better educated there is a good deal of secret infidelity and participation in religious rites is regarded more or less as a social convention. But the

great majority of the Irish people not only observe the outward forms of their faith, but are believers at heart.

Catholicism in Ireland, as elsewhere, has largely taken its colour from the soil, and is streaked with local characteristics. The people do not read books on religion. The body of their belief is in great part traditional, much of it going back far beyond Christian times. Festivals and ceremonies differing in little but name from the days when they were presided over by Pagan deities still persist. Rites attending birth and marriage and death, though frowned on by the Church for centuries, are still in vogue. Charms and spells and incantations still hold the imagination and determine many of the actions of the people, as in the days of Cuchulain. Side by side with these beliefs has grown up a Christian ritual, devoutly observed but imperfectly apprehended. "Catholicism in many rural districts and towns," says Mr. W. P. Ryan, "has long been marred by overgrowths that have nothing to do with essential Catholicity"; and he goes on to explain how "the active and unrestrained folk fancy" has been at work within the fold of the Church, producing its own theological and ecclesiastical miracles, and elevating the priest to the position of "a wonder-worker, a sacred magician." "He could work miracles at will, he could turn obstreperous sinners into animals, to quarrel with him was unlucky in the gravest degree." The notion of mysterious priestly

power is "tacitly encouraged by a number of the Catholic clergy." Many of them are "religious folk-lorists. Theologically they live and breathe in a folk-lore atmosphere, and much of Catholicism and Church history they have turned into folk-lore pure and simple. Even priests addressing fairly well-educated congregations adopt the folk-lore habit and attitude. This is a subject on which candid and progressive priests betray both concern and hesitancy. They deplore the position and all it implies, but the thing and the tradition have gone so far that they fear any decisive handling of the evil would have a ruinous effect on the mind of the populace. For thousands of the people by this time cannot distinguish between the folk-lore and essential Catholicism, between moonshine and reality."

The doctrine that the Church has most successfully impressed on the popular mind is that a Hell of fire and brimstone and physical torment awaits all sinners unless they go to Mass, repent before they die, and receive the last Sacrament. Hell, and the dread of Hell, are the great realities of Irish Catholicism. God is feared rather than loved, and the Blessed Virgin is appealed to and relied upon to avert His just wrath. Her picture or statue is in every house; her altar in the chapel is more frequented than that of the Blessed Sacrament; so strong is the belief in the efficacy of her intercession that devotion to her is considered a security of salvation; her mediation will secure time for repentance at the end, and

no sinner on whose behalf she intervenes shall be taken unawares. The popular mind does not acknowledge any necessary connection between religion and conduct, or look for the fruits of devotion in a disposition of soul or character ; and its conception of damnation as a penalty of sin is mitigated by a profound faith in the virtue of external observances and in the assurance that repentance will be rewarded by forgiveness. There are considerable areas in Ireland that, while Catholic by outward profession, can hardly as yet be said to have emerged from the anthropomorphic phase of religious belief. The people, as I have said, do not read books ; not even the Bible is to be found in one out of a hundred Catholic homes ; and the priests, as a rule, do not teach doctrine or make much effort to expound and popularise the philosophic basis of Catholicism. "A great deal of the theology, history, &c., propounded by many Irish priests," says Mr. Ryan, "is crude, old-fashioned, or materialistic. It has stern, sombre, barbaric phases. It has much more relation to the Old Testament than to the New. Indeed, not a little of what was hardest and grimmest in Judaism has been turned to their purpose, and is preached with a vengeance. Their material Hell is horrible melodrama ; they have done much to make of us a devil-obsessed people. They take Genesis with bald literalness, their world is just 6,000 years old, to them everything before the Christian era,

except more or less of Judaism, was heathenism wild or foul. Of any philosophy of involution or evolution they reckon nothing or accept nothing. Catholic philosophy seems generally a sealed or an unused book to them; their sermons and their avowedly religious books or booklets are innocent thereof. Progressive priests voice their feelings on the want with great candour. The general sermons and magazine articles are pietistic, emotional, rhetorical, verbose, controversial, or boastful in turn, but few that I have ever heard or read—a very large number indeed—breathe the finer spirit of Catholicity.

. . . Another great trouble is that so much of the priesthood has no particular apostolic or evangelical sense; it is largely professional, highly formalistic, afraid of new ideas, hazy in its notions of the outer world, even of the progressive Catholic elements thereof; alarmed, above all things, over any and every development of “Socialism”; it has lost the old collectivist Catholic ideal. Above the priesthood reigns the episcopacy, which, as a whole, is still more formalistic, more fearful of human nature, more remote from social and intellectual realities, more inimical to nearly all things distinctively Irish; an alien institution for the most part, but one that in this century is steadily losing its prestige. A few members, mostly later appointments, recognise and sympathise with vital Irish ideas, and so possess some living influence. But, generally speaking, the episcopacy is regarded by

progressive priests and active laymen as the obedient servant of the Vatican and its diplomatic and political policy on the one hand, and a check, so far as circumstances allow, on the development of a distinctive and cultured Irish nation on the other."

There are other aspects, too, of clerical policy and organisation that a dispassionate observer is bound to canvass. The Church is the second Irish landlord, assessing its dues on the basis of the valuation of the farms—a fact, by the way, that undoubtedly accounts in part for the eagerness of the priests in the West to hurry on the breaking up of the Protestant-owned grazing lands, and their distribution among Catholic proprietors; and the yearly tribute it receives is in some parts of the country little, if at all, less than the moneys annually paid out by the people in rent or purchase instalments. What becomes of it all no one knows. The laity are inflexibly excluded from the smallest share of Church administration, and no priest in Ireland renders any account of the sums that pass into his hands. One reads in the papers of an endless flow of bequests into the ecclesiastical exchequer, and one hears on every hand of the generous proceeds of the Easter and Christmas offerings, and of the half-yearly "Stations" at which the priest collects his dues in person. There are many Church laws, again, prohibiting charges for spiritual services. Yet everyone in Ireland knows that charges are made and sometimes at

so high a rate as to make the reception of the sacraments impossible. In spite of statutes of the Synod of Maynooth, priests habitually bargain beforehand for their marriage fees, and marriages are not infrequently broken off by reason of their demands. As a rule, however, whatever is asked is paid, the peasantry believing it to be unlucky to incur the ill-will of the priest at marriage. Christenings, churchings, and sick calls have also a cash value which varies with the income of the parishioner ; in some dioceses priests never attend the funerals of the poor ; in others a plate is placed on the coffin for the receipt of offerings and as much as £100 has been known to have been collected in this way. Priests occasionally leave considerable fortunes behind them, and, no doubt, support during their life-time a number of impecunious relatives, and there is a general belief that they live very well and invest and speculate with consistent shrewdness. But there is a marked absence of the social and philanthropic and charitable enterprises that engage so much of the time and energy and money of other churches in other lands ; and the most palpable fruit of the sums subscribed is to be seen in the towering, ungainly churches that spring up in the midst of hovels. There appears to have been something like a personal rivalry between priests and bishops to determine which could build the larger presbytery, the more imposing palace, the more expensive church. The whole country is studded with huge churches, of

atrocious architecture, gaudily decorated with every variety of artistic monstrosity—usually, to the credit of Irish craftsmanship be it said, of foreign manufacture. Pride and piety and vanity and forced doles yielded in fear, and, therefore, yielded unwillingly, have rarely combined to produce results so repulsive to the eye and of such questionable service to moral health or economic vitality; and though the catalogue of new buildings is doubtless paraded at Rome as a proof not only of the zeal of the bishops but of the attachment of the people to their faith and its ministers, yet I find few Irishmen who do not admit that the money is extorted from a reluctant peasantry by a process of religious intimidation and who do not resent the wastefulness and vulgarity of its expenditure. The whole problem of the financial relations between priests and people threatens, indeed, to precipitate a crisis in the not distant future. The people pay, but they are given in return not a vestige of responsibility, and they are only beginning to realise all that may reside in the power of the purse; while the dependence of the priests upon the offerings of their parishioners tends to materialise the clergy and to make of avarice almost a virtue. The universal preference in Ireland for dealing only with banks that have Protestant managers is due to the fear that otherwise the priest might learn the size of each customer's account and increase his demands accordingly; and the Irish trick of looking

and living below one's means, while it was fostered by landlordism and misgovernment, is undoubtedly maintained by a dread of priestly exactions.

And in other and more vital matters the inquirer into the realities of Irish life finds himself abruptly confronted by the evidences of clerical power. He sees the hierarchy warring on and suppressing journals that refuse to subordinate to its interests whatever aspirations they may cherish for a united and regenerated Ireland, forbidding village libraries, aiming at a sort of literary censorship, and he asks how freedom of thought can exist in such conditions. He hears from manufacturers of the hindrances placed in their way by the Church, with her restrictions and demands, and he is tempted to believe that Ireland is one of the last battlegrounds of the age-long conflict between Catholicism and industrialism. He regards the inordinate drink bill of the Irish people and wonders whither the spirit of Father Mathew has fled. He cross-examines the emigrants at Queenstown, and begins to suspect that the policy of dragooning the people in their homes and diversions, if it has helped to make the Irish the most continent of nations in the single matter of sex, has also done much to blast the innocent pleasures and gaiety of the countryside, and to invest the prospect of escape into life with a new attractiveness; and the census figures of the United States and of England are there to confirm his

forebodings that, once free from the special atmosphere of Ireland and released from the confinement of a penitential code, the faith of but too many of the Irish emigrants will prove a fragile barrier against the seductions of freedom and the on sweep of an unaccustomed commercialism. The great and continuous defection from Catholicism of the Irish in America is a phenomenon at least as much explicable by the environment they have left as by that they have entered.

I must quote once more from the revealing pages of "The Pope's Green Island." In his day of dominance, says the author—a day not yet so near its end as he would like to believe—"the priest did much to make Irish local life a dreary desert. He waged war on the favourite cross-roads dances—with exceptions here and there—and on other gatherings where young men and women congregated, even in the company of their older relations and friends. Indeed there were cases where the priest, whip in hand, entered private houses and dispersed social parties. The resulting dulness and deadliness of life in rural parishes drove not a few of the young folk to America or Australia. After the Land League there was often a different spirit, and this clerical attitude was resented, and resentment led to resistance, in places. There were always some joyous-hearted priests, and some who had no feeling one way or the other in regard to rural amenities, but, speaking

generally, the older priests in the last half of the nineteenth century were no friends of sport or gaiety or social muster, and were often its relentless enemies. They saw moral danger in the most innocent meetings of the young folk of whom they had the spiritual training, and who were part of what they declared in glowing sermons and speeches to be the most virtuous and most spiritual race under the sun. Their notions of women recalled the fearful and wonderful pronouncements of some of the early Fathers. Love in the main was devilish, a subtle and odious poison designed to set young souls in the way of eternal perdition. That there could be anything sanctified or spiritual in it of itself never seemed to enter into the consciousness or philosophy of those priests, and sickly and melodramatic were the notions of it that they spread. The bare thought of company-keeping or courtship filled them with horror. After several changes theologians had fixed the number of Deadly Sins as seven; Irish parish priests in practice made courtship an eighth . . . But the full tale of the Irish clerical war on lovers would make a big, strange volume of repression and adventure. . . . Eve is the eternal shadow on the Irish ecclesiastical landscape." For all their quick appreciation of sentiment, the Irish peasantry contentedly ignore it when it comes to a matter of marriage. Throughout rural Ireland men choose their wives, and women have their husbands chosen for them, with the most complete and

cheerful indifference to any but the commercial aspects of the transaction ; and the question has even been raised whether, knowing nothing of love, the Irish can really be called a religious people. The Church connives at and fosters the notion that fortune-hunting is a natural and humane pursuit, and that marriage is a matter of a bargain in cash and cattle, rounded off by a priest and a heavy fee. In that regard, I conceive, it has much to answer for, though it may justly plead in partial defence that the good humour and forbearance of the people themselves and the high regard for marriage as a sacrament instilled into them by priestly admonitions, result in an extraordinary standard of mutual fidelity on a basis of placid and affectionate tolerance.

Such, as I see them, are the main features and attributes of the Catholic Church in Ireland—a rather worldly, despotic organisation, regarding itself and regarded by the people as a caste apart, with few or no pretensions to culture, tending to make obedience to its ministers rather than the conduct of life the test of morality, not greatly informed by the spiritual sense, with a social conscience but poorly developed, crude and uninspiring in its doctrines, pursuing its own immediate interests with remarkable acuteness and success, but on the whole without any broad and vital out-look on the society that surrounds it, enamoured of power but using it for the most part with discretion, enamoured, too, of

wealth and spending it mainly for its own collective satisfaction, backward in works of charity, of dubious influence in promoting temperance, virility, truthfulness, and self-reliance, non-economic, if not anti-economic, in many of its tendencies, too often tempted to employ religion in defending or exalting its temporal interests, no friend of mental freedom, or of democracy, or of national self-realisation, a great force, both actual and traditional, in the lives of the people, but a force that is losing rather than gaining, that shows some faint symptoms of approaching exhaustion, that may in the future have to meet an unparalleled concentration of attack. In Ireland, it is true, when examining into the relations of the Church with the Nationalist Party or of the Church with the people, one finds oneself always expecting the explosion that never comes. I do not care to prophesy either the time or manner or occasion of its advent. But I note that a new Ireland is being born with a new backbone and new standards, and pursuing purposes and ideals of its own, that a probing and estimating spirit is astir, that movements of modernism and mysticism are at work among the intellectuals, and that the forces I have touched upon in earlier chapters—the Gaelic League, the co-operative movement, the new aspirations for unity and betterment—are insensibly but inevitably influencing the national thought and character in directions antagonistic to an untrammelled

clericalism. The position and prerogatives of the Church in Ireland and of Ireland in the Church were never more closely canvassed than to-day, and time and again of recent years, and especially since the Gaelic League became a power in the land, the hierarchy has clashed with the popular will only to find itself confronted with such a storm of opposition as compelled retreat. The most needed of all Irish revolutions, the emancipation of the Irish mind, has already begun. Discredited in the public life of the country, with its spiritual claims and teaching sharply criticised by the educated minority, with a growing realisation that democracy and clericalism as it exists in Ireland are incompatible, and that the Church as a corporate body has betrayed the nation in every crisis of Irish history from the Union till to-day, and with resentment and education combining to overcome the superstitious fears that have been at the basis of popular submission to its social pretensions and its financial exactions, the Church, incapable of change in itself and incredulous of change in others, is drifting unconsciously towards a confused and many-sided crisis.

There are some to whom these features of the Catholic policy and discipline and these defects of the Irish character seem arguments against Home Rule, who forecast a regime of religious intolerance and persecution, and flourish Papal decrees in the affrighted face of the British electorate—an electorate humorously unaware

that Papal writs do not run in Ireland, and that the Pope in his political capacity is regarded by the Irish laity, when they think of him at all, as a pro-English institution. Over nineteen-twentieths of Ireland the Roman Catholics already hold supreme political power, and yet nothing beyond the normal amount of discrimination that is practised by every sect in favour of its own votaries in every English village is to be found there, and the Protestant minority, in the south and west, virtually disfranchised as they are, would be the last to pretend that they are in any way "persecuted"; while the idea of an Irish Parliament wanting to bully, or being able to bully, the dour Presbyterians of Ulster is of all political nightmares the most fantastic. The real "religious" issue in Ireland is not between Protestant and Catholic, but between the priests and the people. The lines of division in any assembly that is ever likely to meet on College Green would be primarily urban and rural, and, in the fulness of time, clerical and anti-clerical, with the farmers arrayed against the traders over questions of taxation in the first instance, and the Catholic, Episcopalian and Presbyterian clericals allied against popular control of education in the second. To suppose that Irish politics will split up into a Catholic and a Protestant camp is precisely as absurd as to suppose that women, when they get the vote, will use it as a sex; while the preposterous bogeys of "Catholic domination" "absolute

spiritual and absolute temporal jurisdiction," "the crushing of the Protestant minority beneath the heels of Catholic bigots," and so on, are not merely discounted, but disposed of by the fact that the Irish hierarchy does not want Home Rule, will not lift a finger to get it, and will be heartily relieved if it escapes being compelled to accept it. Every trait in the Irish character which is weak and needs bracing, every feature of clerical organisation and policy which may justly be held to be anti-social or anti-economic or to shackle the national intelligence, so far from impairing the case for Home Rule, enormously strengthens it; and Unionist writers and speakers who affect to deplore "the tyranny of the Church" over the minds and conduct of the Irish masses may well be invited to declare how they propose to get rid of it if not by confronting clericalism in Ireland with the only power that has ever succeeded in subduing it—the power of an educated, self-governing, responsible democracy.

CHAPTER VIII.

POLITICS AND THE HOME RULE BILL

NOTHING is more disconcerting to a Home Ruler like myself than to be troubled with doubts as to how far the Irish people really care for Home Rule. That they are going to get it seems extremely probable; that they ought to get it, and that Great Britain in her own interests ought to grant it, is an opinion in which for my own part I heartily concur; but one would advocate it with far more assurance and far more satisfaction to one's political conscience were it not for an uncomfortable suspicion that the Irish themselves are only half-hearted in demanding it.

I believe it was Lord Dufferin who remarked that the Irish did not know what they wanted, and would never be happy until they got it. There are many senses in which the epigram still holds good. The Irish suffer from a clumsy, extravagant, and above all, anti-national and unsympathetic Government; and that is a genuine grievance. There are times, indeed, when one is almost tempted to think that the Irish do not realise how genuine a grievance it is, and that they have never really mastered the full strength of the case for Home Rule. It is

difficult, at any rate, to detect among them any of the fierce spirit of an oppressed people struggling to be free. They show none of the ardour and determination of the Poles or the Finns. They voluntarily enlist in the British Army and make unsurpassable soldiers. The Royal Irish Constabulary is the most abused, but at the same time the most popular, British institution in Ireland; and practically the whole of its rank and file is composed of Catholics and Nationalists. If Ireland is really "enslaved," it looks as though Irishmen took an unnecessarily active part in forging and riveting the fetters. They proclaim themselves the eternal enemies of the British Empire, yet they fight its battles and extend its dominions. They pose before the world as a nation held down by force, but at the same time it is they themselves who supply the bulk of the recruits for the army of subjugation. They insist that they have a distinct nationality of their own, yet they have allowed themselves to become almost wholly Anglicised.

I do not, of course, mean to imply that when travelling through the country as an uninitiated Englishman I am not made conscious of something foreign in the atmosphere, and of a mode of life and a cast of thought and temperament that, whatever else they may be, are certainly not English. But on the whole nothing more surprises one than to note how far the process of Anglicisation has spread, and how remarkably destitute are the Irish of the distinctive signs

of a separate people. An average Londoner might well be puzzled to decide in what particulars or to what degree the Irish impressed him as being more alien than the men of rural Yorkshire or Cornwall. They would probably strike him as being English provincials with a difference—a difference that was far from amounting to the virtue of a genuine nationality. He would observe, of course, certain local idiosyncrasies of speech and manners; but their effect would be easily outweighed by the evidence confronting him on every side of the completeness of English domination; and if he stopped to think about the matter at all, he would probably conclude that a people reading, speaking and writing practically nothing but English, wearing English dress, playing English games, singing English music-hall songs, copying English ways, and by no means uninfluenced by English social conventions, had forfeited their right to be considered a separate nation. And it is, I think, unquestionably the fact that the nineteenth century crushed out of the Irish people nearly all the characteristics that made them a distinctive entity. It found them Irish; it left them imitation English. It destroyed their language, their pastimes, their arts, their special social atmosphere. One by one the links that bound them to their past were snapped. One by one the emblems of their separateness disappeared. A hundred years ago Irish was spoken up to the gates of Dublin. It has now dropped to be

a mere fugitive tongue of the Western outskirts. It was the language of a literature; it is to-day little more than a dialect. Indeed the very existence, the whole purpose, of the Gaelic League are proof that the Irish, whatever they were in the past, and whatever they may become in the future, are for the time being nondescripts, half provincial English, half renegade and emasculated Irish. That does not, of course, prevent them from asserting and re-asserting their title to be regarded as possessed of all the attributes of real nationality. Their insistence and volubility on the point are, indeed, doubly significant: first because they betray an unacknowledged doubt; secondly, because they give with some precision the measure of the vast gulf that in Ireland separates emotion and rhetoric from fact, and external characteristics from inward essence. A sparkling little book has recently been written to show that the open secret of Ireland is that Ireland is a nation. Historically and spiritually, in sentiment and aspiration, three-fourths of the Irish people are a nation; but their sub-consciousness of nationality is rather disguised than revealed in its outward manifestations. One has always in Ireland to allow for the unknown quantity that intervenes between the thought and its translation into something concrete and tangible. Artists without art, and poets without poetry, they cling to the idea or the emotion, contentedly negligent of its expression and application.

Something of the same elusiveness may be discerned in their political attitudes and practice. With an endless flow of eloquence, the Irish reiterate that nothing but Home Rule will satisfy them, yet they hand over to Americans, Canadians and Australians the irksome duty of financing the agitation that lies so near their hearts. They used not to do so. O'Connell, who organised a far more powerful movement than any that this generation has seen, supported it entirely by Irish contributions; whereas the leaders of the party and the cause to-day are forced more and more to sponge on America and Australia for the means to carry on their work. As a consequence we are presented with the amazing spectacle of eighty odd members of the British House of Commons drawing a large part of their sustenance, and therefore also of their inspiration, from foreign or Colonial sympathisers who know very little about Ireland, who are in no way responsible for its welfare, and whose generous but mistaken assistance has the effect of shifting the centre of gravity of the Irish movement from Ireland itself to another country, and of relieving the Irish people from the necessity of thinking and acting for themselves, and of bearing the expense of their own political propaganda. Things, indeed, have come to such a pass that Mr. Dillon two or three years ago went on record with the damning and pitiful admission that the Home Rule cause could not live for six months if deprived of American interest and support.

210 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

I do not myself endorse that admission, but unquestionably the dependence of the Irish Party upon American and Colonial subscriptions has had other results besides vaguely irritating the British electorate and furnishing the material for much easy Unionist rhetoric. It has had the result of entrenching the Party in an artificial security that has at times enabled it to stand between the Irish people and the very different though not less Nationalist movement that would otherwise have been evolved; and the real reason why the Nationalist leaders opposed the payment of Members of Parliament was that they feared it might let loose upon them a flood of independent candidates challenging their peculiar monopoly. All this has been undoubtedly harmful; but the injury to Ireland has been far greater than the injury to Great Britain. A very able German who had made an exhaustive study of the Irish question, observed as the ironical sum of his reflections that he could not understand how any Irishman could be a Home Ruler or any Englishman a Unionist. In much the same way, but without any irony at all, one might urge that the part played by foreign subsidies in the drama of Irish Nationalism is a matter that should gravely concern every Irishman and that no Englishman need trouble his head about. The case was essentially different when the physical force movement was in being. But to-day the whole Irish agitation is thoroughly peaceful and constitutional; the Irish-Americans

Politics and the Home Rule Bill 211

who subscribe to it are animated, so far as I have been able to diagnose their motives and emotions, far more by a sentimental affection for Ireland than by hostility towards England ; and the great demonstrations in favour of Home Rule that of recent years have attended the pilgrimages of the Irish envoys in Canada and Australia have merely registered the practically unanimous desire of the whole Empire that a serious and vitiating blot on British statesmanship should be removed. Before we English wax indignant over the "foreign paymasters" of the Irish Party, would it not be well if we made sure that our own hands are perfectly clean, that no English party raises funds by methods and for considerations it would prefer not to have known, and that the Liberals and the Conservatives would welcome an invitation to publish a full statement of the donations they receive and of the sources from which they receive them ? If any such auditing of political accounts were to take place I venture to think it would not be the Irish who would emerge with the most damaged reputations.

The point, however, with which I am immediately concerned is that Ireland is perfectly competent to shoulder the burden of carrying on the Home Rule movement without extraneous aid. The pronounced unwillingness of the Irish people to finance the national cause out of their own pockets is not due to any lack of money. The number of professed Nationalists in the country can hardly be less than three millions.

212 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

I am willing, for the purposes of this argument, to write two-thirds of them off the list as non-effectives. That would leave a million convinced Home Rulers. If each of them were to subscribe to the Party funds a shilling a year, an annual income of £50,000 would be the result; and this amount would be amply sufficient to provide for the support of the Nationalist members and leave a handsome margin for the purposes of propaganda. I repeat, the Irish people have the money. There are at this moment over £70,000,000 on deposit in the joint-stock banks, the Post Office and savings banks of Ireland. The imports and exports of the country are some £130,000,000 a year. The Irish spend some £14,000,000 annually on drink and over £3,000,000 on tobacco, and there always appears to be plenty of loose cash when it comes to a question of horse-racing or of building a new church. Yet they are so niggardly in the support of the cause of Nationalism that its leaders have to tramp the world, cap in hand, begging for the means to keep their propaganda in being. Such meagre sums as are raised in Ireland itself are collected in the main by the priests who exact full payment for their services and by the traders who use the Party for the further enslavement of the farmers. Always suspicious of the Party, the Church is its paymaster from well-understood motives of policy rather than of sympathy. Always uneasy under the domination of the Church, the Party can only make a dash for

Politics and the Home Rule Bill 213

freedom at the risk of inviting self-destruction. A close observer of Irish politics, indeed, can usually tell the state of the Party's funds by noting the degree of its subserviency to the Church. When America is generous the Party, as it did in 1906 during the debates on the Education Bill, will venture on a little whirl of independence. When the exchequer is low, it has no option but to come, however reluctantly, to the clerical heel.

What is one to make of all these disquieting contradictions? Is it that Home Rule appeals to the Irish merely as a nebulous sentiment, and that their patent and increasing reluctance to sacrifice anything for it gives the measure of its essential hollowness? To say so would be, I think, to overreach the mark. But there is this unquestionable historical fact to be weighed, that the demand for Home Rule only became really formidable when it was linked on to the agrarian agitation. The land-hunger of the peasantry has undoubtedly furnished the main motive-power of the movement for political autonomy, and Irish nationalism has been very largely the decorative, emotional, and rhetorical side of an agitation to beat rents down and get rid of landlordism. The ownership of the land has been throughout the tangible, immediate and crucial issue; Home Rule has never been anything but a vague, flattering, unformulated aspiration. It is no exaggeration, I think, to say that the chief impulse towards self-government

to-day comes not from Ireland, but from England, or rather from Westminster. It proceeds from the presence in the British Parliament of some eighty Nationalist M.P.'s who hold the Government at their mercy in the sense that if they vote against it and with the Unionists it falls, and whose action in British politics is determined solely by their views, not of British, but of Irish interests. One may even go further. The peasant proprietor is not the same man, nor is he susceptible to the same influences, as in the days when the satisfaction of his historic passion for the ownership of the soil seemed an incredible dream. Divorced from the struggle for the land, Home Rule wears in his eyes a different and a less inviting aspect. With all his instincts and interests now ranged on the side of things as they are, a measure that threatens so much disturbance and ill-feeling and extra taxation has come to be regarded less as an act of liberation than as a disconcerting menace. He would not, of course, say so—free speech as an expression of free thought has as yet barely dawned in Ireland—but the inimitable doggedness with which he grips his purse-strings is almost in itself a species of eloquence.

Too much, however, may easily be made of all this, and in my judgment the Unionists attempt to make far too much of it. They cherish some fantastic idea that if only Ireland could be, as they put it, "let alone," if only the poets and the dreamers and the journalists and

the politicians would cease from troubling, if only the influences that are making for peace and prosperity were allowed to produce their natural fruits without interference either from within or without, the country would outgrow its craze for autonomy and settle down into a contented part of the United Kingdom. I believe that idea, which amounts in effect to a demand that Parliament should be abolished and all Irish history forgotten, to be a complete delusion. In Ireland once a Nationalist always a Nationalist. The political lassitude which of late years has crept over the temper of the Irish people, the not less visible alienation from the personnel and tactics of the Irish Party, the virtual bankruptcy of the United Irish League in the districts where land purchase has brought agrarian tranquillity, do not mean that the masses of Irishmen have in any way recanted their Nationalism. They may wear their faith more passively and indifferently than in the days when it was associated with the prospect of material rewards, but it still represents a habit and an instinct the roots of which go far back into the Irish past. Bound to their leaders—the only political leaders they possess—by many ties of long co-operation, gratitude and emotion, there can be no question of their revolting from the Nationalist creed. So long as Ireland sends any representatives at all to the Imperial Parliament, four-fifths of them will be Nationalists demanding Home Rule ; and so long as that is

216 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

so the Irish Question will still be with us. Coercion and "resolute government" as a means of altering the political disposition of the Irish people have proved total failures; the newer and more adroit method of smothering Nationalism with money-bags and doles and a surfeit of extravagant pourboires, is destined to a not less ignominious collapse. The desire to be masters in their own household, once implanted in a people, is not a thing that easily dies; in Ireland it is imperishable. It may wax at one time and wane at another, but it always persists and no calculation is sound that is based on the possibility of either forcing or seducing the Irish people to abandon it.

That their devotion to it is mixed up with a good deal of meretricious sentiment and self-pity and rhetorical vapouring is, no doubt, true enough. It is as true as that the ordinary Irish Home Ruler, who has cheered for Home Rule and passed resolutions demanding it all his life, has but the faintest conception of what it would mean in practice. Nevertheless, it is a sentiment that stands for something real and potent in the life and consciousness and yearnings of the people; and though often held without conviction or real examination, and often belied by appearances and action, it expresses itself almost automatically at the polls in a way that cannot be challenged or circumvented without calling into question some of the first principles of democracy. It is not only safer to assume

that a people mean what they say and want what they declare they want, but in practical politics there is no other alternative; and all attempts to deride or belittle the repeated pronouncements of the Irish people in favour of Home Rule, to argue that the Nationalist M.P.'s are not really representative, to go behind the plain import of a popular verdict that is reaffirmed on every available opportunity, and to insist that it is only extorted by terrorism and chicanery—all such attempts are not only futile but altogether subversive of the theories on which our political system rests.

To say this, however, by no means implicates one in any unqualified approbation of the Nationalist Party, or of the majority of its members, or of the mechanism by which they work their propaganda. It is possible, indeed, to admire and sympathise with them in many ways, although all but a dozen or so are mere ciphers, of little account in their own constituencies, and of none at all at Westminster except as voting-machines. They are, for instance, brilliant Parliamentarians. Both as orators and as tacticians they are superior, far superior, to any other group in the House of Commons. Although most of them are poor men, who could not live in London unless their expenses were paid for them, no breath of corruption has ever touched their honour. They hold rigidly aloof from the wild scramble for Government patronage. Often torn by personal feuds, they yet contrive

218 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

on the whole and against heavy odds to preserve a unity that is little less than marvellous, and they have learned with consummate dexterity how to extract the last ounce of advantage from their position of nominal independence varied by occasional and temporary alliances. Their life can hardly be an enjoyable one. They are in the House, but not of it. They feel and proclaim themselves a foreign body in its composition. With ninety per cent. of the subjects on which it legislates they feel no concern whatever; and the one subject which engrosses them has long since revolted the House. Parliament is nauseated with Ireland, and the great debates on Irish affairs that read so well when reported verbatim in the Irish papers take place for the most part in an empty, yawning Chamber. To enliven its proceedings with scenes of violence and obstruction, to degrade and stultify the assembly they cannot master, to sting and outrage and gibe at English sentiment and prejudices is, after all, a tedious and unproductive form of vengeance or consolation. It can never have reconciled Irish Nationalists to being exiles in an alien Parliament where they are hopelessly outnumbered, always in opposition, and rather openly despised and disliked, or to being surrounded by a resplendent society in which they have no part, or to fighting year after year towards a goal that seems ever to recede. On the whole I do not know of a political existence more discouraging, irksome and wearing than that of the Irish party in London.

For these reasons, and for many others, I feel, as I have said, a certain sentimental admiration and sympathy for the Irish Nationalists. But I cannot on that account, or because their ultimate aim has my entire approval, hide from myself that the last twenty years have witnessed a steady decline in the personal and representative character of the Irish M.P.'s. Men have been foisted upon the Party who, in their heart of hearts, do not care twopence about Home Rule, who represent the local publican, money-lender, or priest far more faithfully than they represent the National cause, who habitually place the interests of their own special trade or creed or class above the interests of the country as a whole, and who are fitted neither by education nor experience nor inclination for any kind of politics higher than those of the committee room and the monster meeting. It is the presence of too many men of this stamp in the Irish ranks that partly explains why the Nationalists have gathered so few recruits among the rising generation, and why the younger blood has tended to run in other and more vigorous and broader channels. I have touched already on the failure of the Party to understand the new movements that are stirring Irish life and thought, on their jealousy of every effort at non-partisan development from within, on the narrowness of their definition of nationality, on the negativeness and sterility which of late years and in more directions than one have overtaken their policy.

220 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

They have made but little attempt to conciliate Ulster, and they have shown at times a misunderstanding of the English nature and character hardly less complete than the English misunderstanding of the Irish nature and character. A tendency has steadily developed even among their professed supporters to regard them rather as play-actors provided for their diversion than as the protagonists of the national cause. "In a land," wrote a candid Nationalist not long ago, "where there are so few amusements, where the theatre and the ball and the concert are regarded as being certainly dangerous and in all probability sinful, the tours of the Parliamentary Party contribute not a little to introduce a much-needed element of gaiety into the national life. Redmond and his merry men are to Ireland very much what Thespis and his must-smear'd mummers were to the inhabitants of old Attica." It is an old story that the average Irishman's idea of Paradise is an endless mass-meeting in the valley of Jehoshaphat; and the fact that the Nationalist leaders have been able to count on huge audiences, flamboyant resolutions—language in Ireland means a very different thing from language in any other country with which I am acquainted; it is an end in itself—banners and brass bands, and an infinity of cheering, argues little or nothing as to the degree of earnestness and conviction among the common people or as to their real opinions of their leaders. It has, however, its value in making good the Party's

Politics and the Home Rule Bill 221

claim to be the acknowledged representatives of Irish Nationalism. I do not see how this claim can be disputed. The Irish Party are in no serious danger of being ousted. The break that the Sinn Feiners have made in their ranks is as yet so slight as to be almost imperceptible; and the O'Brienites, while a power in Munster, are not, so far as my observation goes, a growing power. From the open attack of rival Nationalist bodies, either more extreme or more moderate than themselves, Mr. Redmond and his followers seem to me, on the whole, fairly secure. They have the organisation and the money; the Church shows no disposition to throw away a weapon it has hammered into malleability or to open a path for a more stalwart Party little inclined to take its cue from the priesthood; the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill was an overwhelming justification of the policy of Parliamentaryism; and whatever the ultimate fate of that measure, the Nationalists in my judgment, will remain the Party in possession.

But they cannot be said to have made the best, or anything like the best, use of their authority. They have conspicuously failed in what should have been one of their prime duties—the political education of the electorate. In the past twenty years the mass of Englishmen have hardly given ten minutes' consecutive thought to the root-problem of Irish Government; but I doubt whether the Irish themselves have given much

more. The Nationalist leaders have never encouraged their followers to come to grips with the question in any ponderable form ; they have declaimed about Home Rule with inexhaustible iteration, but they have never discussed it ; they are at least as much responsible as any British Government for the measures that in the past two decades have profoundly affected the practical aspects of the Irish Question by revolutionising the scheme of Irish finances to Ireland's detriment, but they have never explained to their people the irrefragable bearing of the Wyndham Act, for instance, or the Old Age Pensions Act, or the Insurance Act on the prospects and scope and character of whatever Home Rule Bill they might succeed in procuring. Whether the type of self-government to be granted to Ireland should be "Federal" or "Colonial," whether Ireland should make an effort to pay her own way or should continue to live on British bounty, whether she should have full or only partial control, or no control at all, of her customs and excise—on all these matters and on many others like them, the Nationalist leaders have hardly vouchsafed a single word of real guidance and illumination. In many ways they have curiously reproduced in the sphere of public life the tactics and attitudes of the Church in the sphere of religion. They have been as keen as the most militant Bishop on making unity and subservience to the organisation the supreme test of virtue ; they have resented

and wherever possible have repressed Irish criticism and independence of thought with the same ardour; consumed with self-importance—there are few men who can devote a lifetime to the trade of patriotism and still keep their balance—and persuading themselves that they are not merely the representatives of the nation but the nation itself, they have scented out heresies with a more than theological suspiciousness; and, like the ecclesiastics, they have played on the folk-fancy of the people and fostered the popular conception of Home Rule as the magic climax to an epic struggle, an unbarring of the gates to some wonder-working political and economic Paradise in which money will flow like water, and land can be had for the asking, and emigration will cease and industries multiply, and nobody need do a stroke more work than his inclination prompts. For windy unreality and debilitating claptrap I have never encountered anything to equal the average Nationalist's presentation of the case for Home Rule; nor can I easily recall any political spectacle at once so comical and so pitiful as the scandalised amazement of the leaders when a movement in favour of fiscal autonomy began to declare itself among the people, and the sharpness with which these misguided backsliders were officially informed that it was none of their business even to discuss such questions and that their whole political duty was comprised in trusting the Party. Whether rightly or wrongly from the standpoint of tactical

necessity. the Nationalist Party, itself a pledge-bound and arbitrary organisation, has never tolerated the exercise of independent judgment by the people ; and its gasconading " resolutions," its whole machinery for manufacturing opinion to order, its reliance upon the coercion of the United Irish League to bring recalcitrants into line and stifle the free expression of private thought, its refusal to put forward any Home Rule scheme of its own, and its persistence in picturing self-government as the equivalent of an Irish El Dorado, have been eminently and disastrously calculated to weaken the will and confuse the mind of the Irish people. It is safe to say that the framework of the third Home Rule Bill when it was at last unveiled came with as great an effect of surprise to the average Irish Nationalist as to the average Englishman.

I have never pretended to regard Home Rule as a panacea. In my view there is no one cure, just as there is no one cause, of Irish ills ; and to talk as though the Irish Question were all politics, as though the Constitutional issue were the whole of it instead of being a part of it, or as though the grant of self-government would effect some immediate and miraculous transformation in the temperament or the material fortunes of the Irish people seems to me altogether misguided. Yet there are many and powerful arguments that may be advanced I will not say in favour of the third Home Rule Bill, but in favour of Home Rule as a principle, and of its

application to Ireland on a wide and liberal scale. The supreme defect of our government in Ireland is that it has failed to win the trust and goodwill and co-operation of the Irish people. It is just as much an alien Government to them, just as out of touch with all those qualities, instincts, characteristics and points of view that make them a different people, as would be a German Government in England. Nobody seriously questions that we are ruling Ireland against the inclinations of the vast majority of the Irish people. Over about nine-tenths of the country, no man who is suspected of being favourable to our rule, no man who does not advocate a radical change in its spirit and methods, has a chance of being elected to the Imperial Parliament. There are innumerable lessons to be learned from Irish history, but there is none plainer than this—that until the majority of the people feel that they do in some sort control their own destinies and have in a measure a shaping hand in their own government, until they are made conscious of a harmony between Irish sentiment, instincts, and responsibility and the daily work of Irish administration, the country will never be contented, will never be to us anything but what it is now, a source of embarrassment and weakness. Here we are with this resplendent Empire of ours, our magnificent fleet, our exalted position in the family of nations. And in all this the great masses of Irishmen feel they have neither part nor pride. It does

not thrill them ; they do not wish it well ; they have never been given a chance of wishing it well. Over four hundred million people of infinitely diverse interests and characters have been reconciled to our rule, are loyal to our flag, have confidence in our justice and honesty, feel themselves uplifted by a sense of brotherhood and kinship in one vast Imperial community. Ireland alone stands apart, distrustful and disaffected.

What would a dispassionate inquirer make of this anomaly ? Would he not at once ask whether there was anything in the system of government that we have adopted in Ireland that was different from the system we have adopted throughout the rest of the Empire ? And once started along that line of inquiry, what would he find ? He would find that everywhere except in Ireland we have made a practice of taking freedom and elasticity and the utmost play of local opinion as the watchwords of our Imperial rule, of allowing each white community in the Empire to develop in its own way with a minimum of interference from London, of placing self-government in the forefront of our policy and of rearing a sense of Imperialism on a satisfied sense of nationality. He would find, too, that this policy has brought us in a harvest of loyalty and devotion from many scattered and endlessly variegated dominions ; that it has been the means of reconciling races hitherto separated

by a seemingly incurable antagonism ; that it has healed the ghastly wounds of civil war. Would he not, therefore, be likely to conclude that it is the failure to apply this policy to Ireland that is at the root of the trouble Ireland has given us ? Would he not be tempted to say to the British people : “ Do in Ireland what you have done in Canada and South Africa ; trust the principle that has never yet failed you ; make up your minds that there is just as much human nature in Ireland as anywhere else, that coercion, or the suspicion of it, breeds resentment, antipathy and disloyalty, and that self-government in the end will lead there, as elsewhere, to concord and the strength that comes from a willing partnership ? ” I think it extremely likely that a dispassionate inquirer would come to some such conclusion ; and the more he studied Ireland and realised the divergencies between the English and Irish character and modes of life and social and economic conditions and mental outlook, the more certain would he be that the conclusion was a sound one. And if he then transferred his attention to England and to Westminster, and saw the Imperial Parliament, already overburdened with work, discussing the drainage of the river Bann and the conduct of a police magistrate in Castlebar ; or if he sat through a full-dress Irish debate in a House joyously emptied of all its British members except the present and the late Irish Secretary, and attended only by some sixty Irish Nationalists

and a dozen Irish Unionists ; or if he read how the Irish Nationalists have subverted Parliamentary procedure and have dominated the course of British affairs, of which they know little and care less, solely by their judgment of what would suit Irish interests—would he not feel like saying that Home Rule for Ireland means Home Rule for England ?

I believe there is reason and probability in these arguments and expectations, and that a full measure of Home Rule, besides relieving the Imperial Parliament of a mass of business it has neither the leisure nor the knowledge to deal with adequately, would tend to give Irishmen a new interest in their native land and so prove an impetus to a greater prosperity, would in the long run unite all Irishmen to one another in bonds of friendly and invigorating strife, and would also unite Ireland to England by ties of mutual helpfulness and sympathy far more enduring than the unnatural, the irritating, the deeply detested link that now joins them. But there is another and a stronger argument for Home Rule, and that is that without it a normal and healthy public life is impossible in Ireland. It is difficult for Englishmen to realise how completely thought is distorted, action paralysed, and character weakened in a country that desires, and is denied, the right of managing its own affairs. Until the abstract question that underlies the struggle for Home Rule is settled, nothing else can be settled in any final or satisfactory

form; the supreme issue must continue to overshadow and confuse all other issues; and opinion, instead of playing freely over the whole field of politics, and wrestling with urgent and tangible problems, must continue, as now, to be compressed on either side of a single point and marshalled in defence or attack of a theory that goes right down to the roots of government. Ireland without Home Rule is not a nation or even a State in any effective sense of the words. It is simply a system of administration, and a system imposed from without, ignoring or merely guessing at the wishes and needs of the people, out of touch with, and unresponsive to, native sentiment, and uncontrolled by any local authority. So long as this system obtains, the Irish can never develop any real sense of responsibility. They are not masters in their own household. They do not themselves spend the moneys raised from them by taxation. They are a ruled people in a state of latent and spiritual revolt against their rulers. Their energy and acuteness are frittered away on wrangling with, agitating against, or trying to wheedle an alien and uncongenial Government. The current of national life, as I have said before, is insensibly deflected from Ireland to England and the people grow inured to the emasculating habit of leaning upon assistance from without. And the assistance that thus comes to them is as a rule both unwholesome and inappropriate. Whenever Parliament has legislated for Ireland in the

light simply of its own conceptions of Irish needs and the proper way of meeting them, it has almost invariably blundered. Nothing else could be expected when the legislature of a comparatively rich and highly industrialised country makes the laws for a country with a low standard of living and predominantly agricultural. No statesmanship in the world could devise Acts of Parliament that would apply equally and equitably to communities so different in their economic formation, their fiscal and commercial interests, their whole scale of life, as England and Ireland. The results of the effort to do so have inflicted upon Ireland a three-fold hardship. Either she has been heavily fined by being forced to conform to British interests and ways of doing things—the equalisation of the spirit duties, the imposition of Free Trade, the amalgamation of the two Exchequers, the Poor Law, and the whole extravagant scheme of Irish administration are cases in point; or else—as for example, in the matter of Old Age Pensions and National Insurance—measures have been dumped upon her, beneficent in purpose, but altogether unsuited in many vital details to the special circumstances of Irish life; or else—the commonest case of all—questions of the deepest concern to her have been simply let alone for lack of time, or courage, or inclination to deal with them.

But it is not only that national character is debilitated and that Ireland is alternately preyed upon, neglected, or over-indulged by England

as the result of the legislative union. It is also that political opinion in Ireland, and all that depends on it, is poisoned at the source. In his profound and illuminating study of the Irish question—the most genuinely statesmanlike essay that the controversy has yet produced—Mr. Erskine Childers, in a few pungent pages, has painted the mental and moral disorganisation, the incongruous groupings, the artificial compressions, and the bitter waste of intellect, patriotism and ability that are the direct consequence of the delay in granting Home Rule. There is, as a matter of fact, no organic public life, no independent political opinion, no real political education of any kind in Ireland. When the attack or defence of an entire system of government is the dividing-line between parties, it is useless to look for the healthy clash of mind with mind over ordinary questions of current politics. Some seven-eighths of the Irish people desire Home Rule, but hardly any of them have thought out the form they wish it to take, or have grappled at close range with its manifold problems; they are scarcely ever called upon to argue it in a contested election; it represents in their minds an instinct, an ideal, a Utopia, to the attainment and fulfilment of which they postpone every other political consideration.

And in the same way and for the same reasons the minority that attacks Home Rule is equally absorbed in its task and equally divorced from a natural and unfettered inquiry into lesser but

232 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

more actual problems. The alignment of interests and parties that is thus produced touches on the grotesque. We see the representatives of the Irish farmers and peasantry—as Catholic and conservative a class as any in Europe—allied with British Radicals, with whom they have scarcely an idea or an aspiration in common. We see the industrial democracy of Ulster, which if it could speak and act freely, would find expression in an advanced Labour Party, returning to Parliament a body of members who form the extreme wing of the Tory Party. We see the Ulster farmer, with the same interest in the land question as the farmer of Kerry, yet insuperably divided from him by divergent views over the constitutional issue. We see the Radical artisans of Belfast hand in hand with the Conservative squirearchy and prosperous lawyers in opposition to the principle of self-government. We see a section of the Nationalist leaders thwarting the magnificent work of rural regeneration accomplished by Sir Horace Plunkett, because they suspect it of weakening the desire for Home Rule. We see all Ireland inveighing against Dublin Castle, yet artificially prevented from combining on its reform. We see an almost utter absence of informed opinion on such questions as licensing, education, the powers and position of the Church, the state of the railways, the conditions of Irish labour, the development of the national resources, the work and policy of the Congested Districts Board, the new problems created by the establish-

Politics and the Home Rule Bill 233

ment of a peasant proprietary, the fiscal issue, and so on. There are questions enough in Ireland to keep half-a-dozen parties plentifully and usefully employed. But all Irishmen feel the futility under present conditions of inscribing anything but Home Rule or the Union on their political banners. Opinion is enslaved to the necessity of determining the fundamental issue; and only the dissolvent of autonomy will set it free.

But, to my mind, the conclusive argument for Home Rule is that without it there seems no chance whatever of the Irish character becoming strong and responsible. The fruits of British misgovernment in Ireland and of the country's lamentable history can rarely be presented in a tabulated and statistical form; they are to be looked for rather in the very soul of the people. If it were true that what bad legislation has done good legislation can undo, then the remedial measures which Great Britain has devised during the past few decades might in themselves be enough to repair the ravages of seven centuries. But, as we all know, human affairs are not so simple as all that, and the effects of a vicious policy may not only endure long after the policy itself has been reversed, but may even remain uninfluenced by its reversal. That is what has happened, and what will happen, in Ireland. It seems to me idle to suppose that a people who have been so crushed and oppressed as the Irish and whose economic and mental growth has been

so long and so deliberately stunted, can be brought back to health by a single restorative, or by any restorative at all that is administered externally. Not only have we not overtaken the ill effects of our misrule in Ireland, but we never can overtake them. They have outdistanced any real help that we could render them; they can only be restrained and destroyed by the Irish themselves. Our assistance is limited merely to the removal of grievances, the redressing of injustices, the creation of opportunities, the adoption, so far as our imaginative obtuseness will permit us, of an attitude of understanding and sympathy. Beyond that we cannot go. The far more arduous task of rebuilding the national character of the Irish people is one that can only be grappled with in Ireland and by Irishmen. In any lasting and fundamental sense we can do nothing for the Irish; we can only put them in the position of doing things for themselves.

But that is precisely the effect of Home Rule on which I count most implicitly, and by which one may confidently set the greatest store. The character and temperament of the Irish people, I quite agree, are altogether beyond England's power to influence; for whatever is remiss in their moral or economic aptitudes they must find and furnish their own remedies. No legislation of ours, no mere readaptation of the constitutional machinery, can give them the force and virility, the balance and backbone, the

perseverance, the contempt for untruth and deceit, and all the other strong qualities in which candour itself must admit their deficiency. Too much self-pity, too much self-praise, added to misunderstanding and detraction from without, and reinforced by a convulsive history that has thrown to the surface all the unhealthy elements of society, have unquestionably confused the standards, misdirected the energies, and weakened the moral fibre of but too many of the Irishry. In all politics one has to allow for a certain difference between private and public utterances, but in no politics is the difference so profound as in Irish. For bodies to pass resolutions to which all present are secretly opposed; for Irish politicians to deride in conversation and in private letters pretty nearly everything they are engaged in upholding in Parliament and on the platform—these are the everyday phenomena of Irish affairs. Make-believe, dissimulation, a conscious insincerity, and the miasma of moral cowardice permeate nearly the whole country, and one is almost tempted at times to declare that if half-a-dozen leading Nationalist M.P.'s were to say on a public platform one-half the things they mutter in private about the devitalising tyranny of the Church over the social life and mental development of the people, it would do more for the essentials of Irish welfare than the most perfect of Home Rule Bills. Over far too large a portion of Ireland terrorism is the rule of life, opinion is no more than the bellowing

236 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

of the loudest claue, civic spirit is represented by the wranglings and intrigues of factions, performance fails to follow promise, patriotism finds its only expression in a litter of histrionic resolutions, the very conception of industrial discipline seems to have perished, witnesses perjure themselves with an Asiatic liberality, juries return verdicts that every man in the twelve knows to be against the evidence, the individual cowers before the priest, and the whole conduct of life is scaled down to a turbulent level of greed, langour, intimidation, inefficiency, falsity and superstition.

Home Rule will not by itself exorcise all this, any more than it will suddenly cure the Irish of their charming habit of never being to blame for anything, or nerve them all at once to throw off the despotisms of leagues and factions, or make the Irish character instantaneously strong. But it can at least—and, so far as I can see, nothing else can—furnish the fusing and essential element out of which strength may be slowly formed, an element which, with things as they are, is not merely wanting, but is all but unattainable. It can at least bring the Irish face to face with themselves, strip them of their last excuse, and place them under the compulsion of self-respect and national accountability to war on the truculent vanities, the bullying and ruffianism, the hectic pretences, and malingering “patriotism” that at present disfigure Irish life and politics. Nothing is of much importance to a man or a people in comparison with character, and in the

building up of character no factor is more vital than responsibility. A sense of responsibility for their own destiny and development is precisely what the Irish have never had, and only Home Rule can give it them.

It may be a perception of all that Home Rule may reasonably be expected to contribute to Irish virility and self-reliance that accounts in part for the changed attitude of the British public. It is at any rate clearly impossible to rouse England against Home Rule as it was roused twenty-five years ago. The old emotions have weakened almost to vanishing point. There is to-day a frank recognition of the evils which English misgovernment has inflicted upon Ireland. There is an honest desire to make reparation. There is an effort, almost pathetic in its futility, to understand the Irish character. The old bitterness and rancour have almost wholly disappeared, and England grows less and less willing to take its cue on matters of Irish policy from the Ulster extremists. The foolish taunt that the Irish are unfit for self-government is no longer heard. The fear of Home Rule producing, or giving free rein to, a *régime* of religious intolerance has been dispelled by the repeated demonstrations that in Ireland bigotry and the persecuting spirit are a Protestant monopoly. The loyalism of Ulster, again, no longer makes its old appeal. We know more about it to-day than we did in the 'eighties; its origins and sincerity are not quite so much above suspicion

238 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

as they used to be ; and British simple-mindedness finds it difficult to-day to be moved by protestations of devotion to the Crown and Empire that are accompanied by preparations for passive rebellion. Moreover, the constitutional objection to Home Rule has inevitably lost something of its influence. We have seen of late the Constitution so buffeted and disrupted that one more blow, one more derangement, seems almost a trivial matter.

A new generation, in short, has grown up with a new outlook, and knowing little or nothing of the catchwords and fears that so passionately stirred the country twenty-five years ago. And this generation, being more democratic, is more in sympathy with the struggle of a people to realise itself ; and being more Imperial, is more conscious of the loss of Imperial power and vitality and unity that is the result of Irish discontent ; and being more sensitive, is more quick to realise and more anxious to remove this black and stupid blot on the British name. The lesson, moreover, of South African pacification has sunk deep into its consciousness ; it has seen what a splendid fruit of appeasement and gratitude, even under the most adverse circumstances, may be had from a policy of trusting a nation instead of trying to dragoon it. The bugaboo of separation has been deprived of its terrors ; and Englishmen to-day perceive that Ireland could not if she would, and would not if she could, be free of the British connection. The comparative

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quiescence of Ireland, the absence of crime and outrage, has had, too, its effect; and it has not been easy for Unionists to denounce Home Rule with anything like the old full-hearted ferocity when they are widely believed to have meditated, *console* Wyndham, some measure of devolution themselves, and when only a year or so ago one Unionist journal after another was pleading for "an open mind on the reopened question," and considering without dismissing the possibility of a representative convention on the whole problem of Irish government.

But if time has modified most and revolutionised some of the aspects of the Irish Question, it has left the problem of North-East Ulster substantially unaffected; and in attempting to assess the magnitude and significance of that problem it seems to me useful to remember not only that parties are invariably most extreme when most conscious of their weakness, but also that by some queer fatality myopic politics and far-seeing commerce often go together. There is nothing in this respect exceptional about Ulster. For a thoroughly superficial and unenlightened view of British problems the prosperous City man may nearly always be relied upon. Wall Street is the last spot in the United States where one would think of looking for political commonsense, and the Belfast manufacturer is in a way true to type when he displays his incapacity for envisaging the Irish question from any but a single and highly distorted angle.

Outside of business the Belfast Unionist seems hardly to reason at all. "We will not have Home Rule," he shouts, in his harsh Northern brogue; and that, so far as he is concerned, settles the matter. In matters of money-making he is a keen and unclouded reasoner, and the city of his idolatry is unquestionably the emblem of a magnificent conquest over inconceivable odds. The splendid energy, fearlessness, force, and tenacity which have made Belfast what it is, a city of inexhaustible industrial marvels, are qualities not to be gainsaid. Perhaps nowhere in the world do 350,000 people produce so much wealth as in Belfast. Their shipyards and linen-mills, their tobacco factories and distilleries, their printing-works and rope factories, make up a great and indisputable record of industrial achievement. It has, of course, its obverse side. Labour, everywhere in Ireland underpaid, is in Belfast sweated to a degree that will undoubtedly demand the early attention of the Irish Parliament. But the extraordinary combination of power and efficiency which the men of the "Black North" have devoted to industrial pursuits, remains, none the less, a commanding fact. To grant them that, and to realise its weight, is to understand in part their attitude and instincts towards the five-sixths of Ireland that is rural, Catholic, chimneyless, and from their standpoint, moribund. If Chicago were planted in Lower Quebec, how would it feel and act towards its hinterland? There is little community of interests or

Politics and the Home Rule Bill 241

sympathies between themselves and the rest of Ireland that Belfast and Londonderry can be brought to feel or acknowledge. All that they ask of the rest of Ireland, indeed, is to be let alone. Their trade relations with it, while considerable, are small by comparison with their relations with the outside world and scarcely mitigate at all their political attitude; they are intensely conscious of their separateness; and they sincerely fear that an Irish Parliament, necessarily dominated by rural interests, would regard them and treat them as milch cows for the Treasury.

That apprehension, though fantastic, is respectable when compared with some of the other influences that play upon the Ulster mind. There is nothing unnatural in an energetic and intensely commercialised community taking up an attitude of suspicion towards a change that must involve placing the predominant political power in the hands of farmers. But Ulster not only has its eyes on the counting-house, but Popery on the brain. With all their hard-headedness, the rank and file of the Ulster "loyalists," true to their Scottish origin, are a singularly emotional people. They still celebrate the Battle of the Boyne and drink to the immortal memory of William III. as though the first were an event of yesterday and the second an active figure in present-day politics. They still speak of the Pope as though a new Armada were on the point of sailing. "Were I to retort the abuse with which my own creed is daily be-

pattered," says Mr. Kettle, "I should describe the Ulster Orangeman as the only victim of clerical obscurantism to be found in Ireland." The hit is a fair one, but the obscurantism of Ulster is more than "religious." It is a wild nightmare of hallucinations in which Protestantism, landlordism, Unionism, and loyalty have come to be regarded as synonymous terms. The Unionists talk of the mob-ruled and Convention-rigged opinion of Nationalist Ireland. But they should go to Ulster if they wish to see glib and fraudulent bossism *in excelsis*, to Ulster where landlords and lawyers use the rawness of the Orange creed as a laughable stepping-stone to place and power, and where the very earnestness, virility, and obstinate fidelity of the men who follow them make them the blind and witless dupes of their own prejudices. For the Ulster leaders one has next to no respect whatever; for the rank and file of their supporters, for the hard-bitten, taciturn, suspicious, simple-minded Orangeman of the Cromwellian type—and there are not a few of him in Ulster—one has a very considerable respect. His political creed, to be sure, ought rather to be called a political cult, a compound of fears, instincts, hatreds, and traditions in which facts are metamorphosed out of all semblance to reality. You can no more argue Irish questions with him than you can argue the race question with a Tennessee planter of the old school. But he is a fine fellow, and he will be quite honestly the most surprised man in the world when he

finds that Home Rule has not taken his farm from him, or closed his workshop, or forced him to attend Mass, or dissolved his marriage by Papal decree. He moves in a world of hysterical unrealities, but he himself is profoundly real, and with absolute sincerity believes himself to be about the last defender of freedom and Protestantism and the Crown in the British Isles.

That is the peculiarity of the Ulster "bluff"—that nine-tenths of it is unconscious. The tenth that is conscious, and that alone therefore deserves to be called bluff, is reserved for the leaders who, in the northern as throughout the other Provinces of Ireland, reproduce the passions and prejudices of their followers in their most exaggerated form. When an elderly barrister from Dublin talks about dying in the last ditch, or marching from Belfast to Cork, everyone knows he is bluffing—everyone, that is, except his Orange audience. When a Belfast manufacturer vehemently exclaims, "No man shall call me a bigot; but if Home Rule comes I'll sack every damned Catholic in my shop," he is not being deliberately humorous. He is talking precisely as nature, training and environment have taught him to talk; you could not, except by trepanning him, make him realise anything contradictory or inconsistent in his utterance; he is simply expressing the ordinary Belfast mind. But the Belfast mind is not the mind of all Ulster, or even of its Unionist and Protestant sections. The farmers and traders of the kind

portrayed by the sincere and patient art of Mr. Shan Bullock have no great affection for Belfast and would infinitely prefer to see Dublin the capital of that self-governing Ireland which they know well enough to be near at hand. They are men of common sense, of sturdy character, and, as a rule, superior physically, socially, and temperamentally to their Catholic neighbours; they have always and sincerely feared and hated Rome, but they take no part in Orange fulminations, nor have they any fundamental hatred towards Catholics as such; they despise them, rather, as shiftless, lazy, seditious, and priest-ridden; the ascendancy spirit still survives among them, and though they will admit in private the inevitability of Home Rule, and though they have no objection to self-government in itself, and are attached to the Union in strict proportion to the benefits they receive from it, pride prevents them from making their views public, from admitting defeat, from "evening themselves down" to the level of those over whom they have lorded it for generations. For these stalwarts, one must remember, are not merely Protestants looking down on Catholics, but colonists despising "the natives." The Ulsterman has the conviction of his superiority bred in his bones; he is one of the conquering race, a member of a higher caste and of a higher civilisation. As such it is his privilege to be ignorant of many things, and most of all of himself. No Orange orator ever began his

speech without assuring his audience that they were the finest type, not merely of Irishmen, but of human beings. Nowadays, indeed, Ulstermen hardly trouble even to cheer so obvious a truism. They have the unmixed, unsophisticated, unconscious arrogance of men who have never been told, and most certainly have never imagined, that they are not infinitely better than their neighbours. If they were led by men of their own kidney, they would be formidable people to deal with. But Ulster has not yet produced a constructive statesman, or one with nerve enough to play the game through. They talked as loudly about Catholic Emancipation, and with the same metaphors, as now; they were as eager to die in the last ditch to prevent the disestablishment of the Irish Church as they are to prevent Home Rule; and then, as now, they brought forward threats of rebellion as proofs of their unexceptionable loyalty. The fact that nothing came of it all does not mean that they were bluffing. Then, as now, they deluded many people, but themselves most of all.

I confess myself, therefore, entirely sceptical as to the possibility of Home Rule, if and when it comes, being resisted by force of arms. A tremendous fuss will, no doubt, be raised, there may be rioting and bloodshed, but there will be nothing in the nature of an armed rebellion, and the spectacle of "loyal" Ulster organising a provisional government of its own and resisting

246 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

the collection of taxes by the Imperial Parliament is one that, I fear, is not destined to gratify the world's sense of humour. If not to the first, then to the second, Irish House of Commons, Ulster, I make little doubt, will send a powerful and authoritative representation that will more than hold its own in the clash of parties and interests. And that confidence is based not merely on the tested genius of Ulster for accepting the *fait accompli* and making the best of it, but on the many and profound changes that in the past five and twenty years have affected the political temper and the economic conditions of the North as of all Ireland. Most of these changes have been enumerated and discussed in the preceding chapters, but among them is one that particularly concerns Belfast—I mean the growth of local trade unionism and the new and searching attention that is being paid to social and industrial questions. The magnificent expansion of the Belfast industries has brought in thousands of workers from the Clyde and the Tyne, who are indifferent to the ancient feuds of Ireland and far more concerned to organise Labour against Capital than Protestants against Catholics. The political leaders continue to play their melodramatic rôles, to stoke the fires of bigotry, and to appeal to the memory of William III. as a reason why a profoundly democratic city should be represented in Parliament by Tory landlords and lawyers; but the operative intelligence of Belfast industrialism is

thinking to-day more of the sweating in the linen trade, and of the hours and wages of labour, and of the appalling slums that disgrace the city than of the Battle of the Boyne. That is a development which will tell with increasing weight as the years go on. The Ulster leaders will not admit, but they cannot but be conscious of, the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to use "religion" as an instrument for perpetuating an economic and political ascendancy. The Orange drum no longer gives forth its old confident sound; there still survives and there is yearly gaining in hopefulness and vigour some breath of the spirit that made Ulster re-echo in sympathy to the French Revolution and champion the rights of man as well as the wrongs of Ireland; by many tortuous paths democracy and Liberalism in Belfast are coming into their own; and it is as certain as anything can be that the Irish Labour Party of the future will draw from Ulster its inspiration and its leader. Indeed when they find that the game is up, and that England has "betrayed" them once more, I do not despair of seeing the Unionists of to-day converted into the stoutest and most thorough-going guardians of Irish Nationality and of the rights and powers of the Irish Parliament.

It is impossible to repress the hope that that day may be anticipated, and that Irish Unionists convinced, as in the course of the next two years they well may be, that Home Rule is inevitable,

and that the preponderant sentiment of the kingdom is against any further attempt to postpone or obstruct its advent, convinced, too, of the folly and futility of either open or passive resistance, and impelled, if by no higher motive, then by the motive of a rational and provident self-interest, may turn from their present unprofitable course to the sober practical business of hammering the third Home Rule Bill into an efficient instrument of self-government. Implicit in Irish Unionism, sometimes publicly avowed in the declarations of its leaders, and at all times freely confessed to in private conversation by the rank and file, is the perception that while all forms of Home Rule are objectionable, the least objectionable is that which bestows upon Ireland the amplest powers and leaves her most unfettered in the use of them. There is hardly a Unionist in or out of Ulster who would not say, "We are opposed to Home Rule, we detest the very idea of it; but if we are to have it, then let it be real Home Rule, let it be a measure endowing us with the widest possible latitude of authority and responsibility and self-dependence, let it be as full and complete a grant of autonomy and as little hampered by Imperial restrictions and control as Canada enjoys or South Africa. That would be a form of self-government not inevitably predestined to disaster, and under it we would take our chance."

I do not think I exaggerate when I say that that, for many years past, has been the second,

the better and the more statesmanlike mind of Irish Unionism. Is there any chance of its becoming politically effective? Has Ulster no representative with the vision and courage to face the facts, and to convert an otherwise sure and irretrievable defeat into a victory that will in a flash restore to Unionism its lost leadership of the Irish nation? Is the last act in the sorry drama of Irish Unionism to be simply one of unavailing and embittering resistance in Parliament with its farcical climax in an impotent "rebellion" in Ulster? Do these political Mrs. Partingtons really prefer a policy that cannot succeed, that can only bring down upon them the contempt and odium of their fellow-countrymen, that can only result in the establishment of a maimed and emasculated Irish legislature, to a policy that would elevate them at once to a moral and intellectual ascendancy over all Ireland, send a lasting thrill of gratitude and admiration from one end of the country to the other, and invest the Parliament under which they are to live with the powers and dignity and freedom worthy of a national assembly and essential alike to its usefulness and their security? Does the sane business mind of Belfast really suppose that Irish manufacturers, employers of labour, property owners, and men of means are going to be less "persecuted" by a British Parliament that is palpably passing under the control of Labour than by an Irish Parliament dominated by a class whose instincts and interests, as Mr.

250 Politics and the Home Rule Bill

Kettle has wittily observed, are "almost sinfully" on the side of conservatism? Do they not realise that, controlling as they do the bulk of Ireland's accumulated capital, its principal industries, its banks, and its stock exchanges, they have a far surer guarantee against unjust or merely "democratic" taxation, and far wider opportunities for making their influence felt, when governed from Dublin than from Westminster; and that the greater the powers of the Irish Parliament and the smaller England's control over Irish fiscal policy, the more assured and invulnerable is their security?

More than any other body of men the Irish Unionists have it in their power to gamble away the future of their country on the off chance that the third Home Rule Bill may not reach the Statute Book, and on the yet more doubtful possibility that they may succeed in frustrating its enforcement, or to transform it into a lasting settlement between the two countries; to secure for Ireland a gutted Legislature or one that will be a potent and unhampered agency for every purpose of national betterment, a divided administration or one wholly and solely under Irish control, a Constitution that will fortify or one that will confuse self-reliance and responsibility; to take the lead in broadening and expanding the present scheme of Irish self-government or to be outvoted in a paltry effort to whittle it down; to rally a united Ireland enthusiastically behind them or to return to

their own country an ignominious, derided and distrusted faction ; to incur as politicians the shame of an inglorious defeat or to win as statesmen a memorable and resplendent victory. Those, as I see them, are the alternatives confronting Irish Unionists ; and no one who realises how much, both for themselves and for Ireland, depends on their decision can forbear to hope to the last and in the face of many disheartening probabilities that reason and foresight may yet guide them to the higher choice.

For the third Home Rule Bill, while a measure of remarkable, of almost excessive, ingenuity, is one that from the Irish as well as from the British standpoint needs amendment. No Liberal can pretend that the Government have risen to the full height of their opportunity, or have drafted a Constitution for Ireland in the same lofty and spacious spirit of statesmanship that they displayed a few years ago in their dealings with South Africa. They have turned their backs on the comparatively simple and final plan of granting Ireland fiscal autonomy, and they have substituted instead a highly elaborate and complex scheme which after much time and friction may lead up to the same goal. While admitting that Great Britain and Ireland ought not to be included in the same fiscal system, they have lacked the boldness to carry their admission to its logical and, I believe, its inevitable conclusion ; and in their anxiety to foil or propitiate Ulster and to avoid startling English opinion—

which they have done nothing to educate on the essential details of the Irish question—they have produced a measure which threatens rather to increase than diminish the amount of attention that the Imperial Parliament will have to devote to Irish affairs, which in no way removes and only slightly attenuates the mischievous and unwholesome participation of Irishmen in British politics, and which restricts the legislative and administrative powers of the Irish Parliament in ways that must, I fear, impair responsibility and prove productive of a great deal of needless and chafing exasperation.

The great merits of the Bill are that it does set up an Irish Parliament with an executive responsible to it, that it does recognise the principle of fiscal differentiation between the two countries, and that it does look forward to, and contribute towards hastening, a time when Ireland will be a solvent country and in control of all, or nearly all, her own revenue and expenditure. Against this, however, must be set the fact that the conceded power of altering or imposing taxation is both severely limited in range and permissive instead of obligatory in character; that the economies effected by Irish administration, while they may bear fruit in reduced taxation, are not to be applied to the extinction of the deficit and that Ireland is thus deprived of a strong incentive to establish a financial equilibrium; that retrenchment and reform of any kind are rendered, not, indeed, impossible, but

exceedingly arduous, by the system of dual control that is to permeate Irish administration ; that the operations of two taxing, two spending and two legislating authorities within the narrow limits of Ireland, and the varied complications inherent even in the cleverest attempt to unite the "contract" system of finance with a degree of fiscal autonomy, are bound to generate confusion and to expose the Irish Chancellor of the Exchequer to the disturbing influence of British Budgets, British schemes of social reform, and British Tariffs ; that some vital services, such as the constabulary, are withheld from Irish control for a stated period and others indefinitely, while no compulsion is laid upon Ireland to take over the remainder ; that the key to agrarian peace is under divided authority ; and that the retention of forty-two Irish members in the Imperial Parliament—at a time when all the probabilities of politics point to an era of small majorities—will not only subject British parties and interests to the manipulation of an alien group, but will mean that Irish demands and grievances will continue to engage Parliamentary time and thought, that the proceedings of the Irish House of Commons will be reviewed in the British House of Commons, that Irish attention will be distracted between Dublin and Westminster, and that the Imperial Parliament will remain the cockpit of Irish parties and the court of appeal for Irish minorities.

I need say nothing as to the dialectical quandary

in which ministers have entrapped themselves by mentioning Federalism in connection with a scheme that includes separate postal services and separate customs, for that is in the main a mere debating point; nothing as to the nominated Senate or the curious plan for revising Anglo-Irish financial arrangements when the present deficit is extinguished, for I cannot believe that either device will survive discussion; and nothing as to the efficacy of the various safeguards, whether for the protection of minorities or the assertion of Imperial supremacy, because in such matters the ultimate and only enduring safeguard is the good sense and good feeling of the Irish people themselves. The anomaly of setting up a Government without power to collect its own taxes, and a Parliament without power to decide its qualifications for membership; the authority and composition of the Joint Exchequer Board; the extensive veto over Irish legislation reserved to the Imperial Parliament; all these are features of far more importance than the more or less of approximation to "Federalism," or the safeguards, or the nominated Senate. But more important still are the blemishes alluded to in the preceding paragraph—blemishes that go far towards dissipating or destroying that sense of responsibility and that national self-reliance and self-respect that should be the supreme goal of Home Rule; blemishes that might have been avoided altogether had the Government approached the Irish Question

from the "Colonial" instead of from a pseudo-Federal angle; blemishes that might still be removed were the Irish Unionists to insist on their abolition. Compared with the comprehensive scheme of Home Rule worked out by Mr. Erskine Childers with such a wealth of understanding and so broad and sure a grip of the psychology as well as the material problems and needs of the Irish people and of Irish Government, the Bill brought forward by the Liberal ministry is not statesmanship but gerrymandering politics; and I gravely fear that it will not only deflect upon England a gathering tumult of Irish animosity and resentment, but will have to be proved unworkable in practice before the field is cleared for a more harmonious and lasting solution. In itself it is a provisional and not a final settlement, and if in the end it paves the way to a final settlement it will be rather by virtue of its defects than of its merits. From that standpoint, and with that expectation, it may be accepted. Inadequate and unstable as it is, it at least embodies a policy more honourable to England and infinitely less harmful to Ireland than the gilded *non possumus* with which Unionists vainly hope to seduce the spirit of Irish nationality.

